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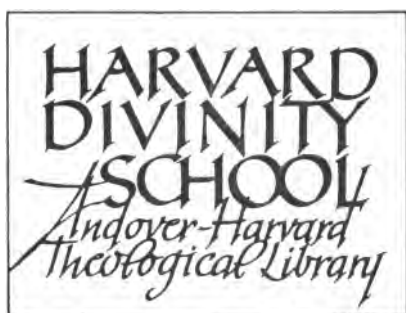
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AN  
INQUIRY  
INTO THE  
FOUNDATION, EVIDENCES, AND TRUTHS  
OF  
RELIGION.

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# CONTENTS

## OF VOL. II.

---

CHAPTER I.	
A revelation needed, . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II.	
A revelation susceptible of proof, . . . . .	7
CHAPTER III.	
What proofs would be a reasonable ground of faith,	15
CHAPTER IV.	
The connexion of the Christian with preceding revelations, . . . . .	26
CHAPTER V.	
The books of the Mosaic dispensation, . . . . .	37
CHAPTER VI.	
The doctrine of the Old Testament respecting God,	46
CHAPTER VII.	
The moral character of the Mosaic institution, . . . . .	55
CHAPTER VIII.	
Terms of acceptance under the Mosaic dispensation,	68
CHAPTER IX.	
Objections considered, . . . . .	80
CHAPTER X.	
A prophet like Moses promised, . . . . .	95
CHAPTER XI.	
Miracles, . . . . .	105

## CHAPTER XII.

Evidence of the divine origin of Christianity from the success of its first preachers, . . . .	13
---	----

## CHAPTER XIII.

Essential agreement among Christians respecting the truths taught in the New Testament, . . . .	14
--	----

## CHAPTER XIV.

Jesus, the Christ, his person, titles, and offices, . . . .	15
---	----

## CHAPTER XV.

The original state of man, . . . . .	17
--------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER XVI.

Effects of the fall. Consequences on human condition, . . . .	18
---	----

## CHAPTER XVII.

The character of man's present probation, . . . .	19
---	----

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Mediation, . . . . .	20
----------------------	----

## CHAPTER XIX.

Mediation, redemption, reconciliation, . . . .	20
--	----

## CHAPTER XX.

Repentance, conversion, . . . . .	22
-----------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER XXI.

Human agency and divine influences, . . . .	23
---	----

## CHAPTER XXII.

Future life, . . . . .	25
------------------------	----

## CHAPTER XXIII.

Faith, . . . . .	27
------------------	----

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Duty of faithful inquiry, . . . . .	29
-------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER XXV.

Duty of Christians toward each other, . . . .	30
---	----

# AN INQUIRY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A REVELATION NEEDED.

WE have before seen what is the power, and what the weakness of human reason. We have seen in the popular religions, and in the doctrines of heathen philosophy, how much it has actually achieved, and wherein it has failed. We have seen how little flattering to human vanity are the fairest monuments of its unaided power; how little support there is to the proud pretensions of its all-sufficiency; how little ground for appealing to its decisions from the authority of revelation; and how little reason to forsake the clear instructions of the Apostles and Prophets, for the mere opinions of the wisest of the ancient sages.

For how full of absurdity and error has been the religion, not only of barbarians, but of nations the most enlightened and refined; and not only the popular opinions, on the subject of religion, but those of the great masters of human science. How vague and uncertain were their opinions; and how feeble, defective, and false appear to us their reasonings, not merely on

abstruse and mysterious points of doctrine, but on those first principles of religious faith, which Christians regard as the very elements of the religion of nature!

Compare the doctrines promulgated from Jerusalem by illiterate men, with those which issued from the celebrated schools of Athens. See the unlettered fishermen of Galilee going forth to make known through the world "the true God and eternal life," while Athens, the metropolis of learning, the arts, and refinement, the nursery of philosophers, and the school of wisdom, was found by one of those emissaries, wholly given up to idolatry, and as to religion, sunk in the most deplorable ignorance and superstition. Look over the catalogue of the popular gods of heathen antiquity. Consider their characters, as they are represented, not by Christians, who might be supposed to be prejudiced and partial judges, but by their own poets, historians, and sages, and those, the most respectable and enlightened. Take into view the impure and cruel rites required in the worship of some of them, compared with the purity and mildness of the Christian worship. Let it be recollected, that whatever violations of temperance, purity, or decency took place at their religious festivals, they were not, like similar excesses among those who live under the light of the gospel, acts of disobedience to him, whom they worship, unauthorized by the principles of their religion, and express violations of its laws. On the contrary, they were a part of their religion itself; were thought to be acceptable to the beings whom they worshipped; were perfectly suited to the character

attributed to them, and were performed for the purpose of recommending them to their favor.

Whatever immoralities in practice may be charged upon Christians, no reproach is thereby attached to the religion itself, because there can be no pretence, that they are authorized, or countenanced in the smallest degree, either by its express laws, or by its general spirit. All that it proves is, not that Christianity is bad, but that they are bad Christians ; not that their religion is imperfect, but that they are so, because they are not what it requires them to be. But this cannot be said of the licentiousness practised at the heathen festivals. To the grossest excesses, which marked the celebration of some parts of their worship, no censure was affixed, no shame was attached ; they were authorized by the religion itself, and actually made a part of it.

Scarcely is any consideration of more weight to show how much a revelation was needed to teach men even the great truths of Natural Religion, than the singular fact, that, in countries unenlightened by revelation, the progress of knowledge in religion has borne no proportion to the progress that has been made in every other kind of knowledge. Religion has seldom, if ever, kept pace with advancement in knowledge. Usually, indeed, has it declined in ages the most enlightened by science, and refined in manners. The age of atheism has been, not that of ignorance and barbarism, but that in which learning flourished, and the arts and refinement were carried to their highest perfection. It has not been the stunted product of a sterile soil and a barren season ; but the

rank growth of a luxuriant soil, and the monstrous production of a season prolific to excess.

In the Jewish nation, for example, it was not in the early and rude period of their story, but in the courtly days of David and Solomon, that we read of those, who, rejecting all religion, said "there is no God," and with the Sadducees of a later age, rejected the doctrine of angels and spirits, denied the doctrine of a resurrection, and that of a soul to survive the body.

In Greece, also, it was not in the dark ages that preceded the dawn of science, nor yet in its early twilight; it was in the midst of its meridian splendor, that the atheistic doctrines of Democritus, and the dissolute maxims of the Epicurean school sprung up and prevailed. In Rome, again,—when was it that the elegant pen of Lucretius was employed in decorating with the charms of poetry the cold doctrines of an atheistic philosophy? It was just at that time, when learning and refinement were attaining their highest perfection. And then too it was, that the same loose principles began to be openly avowed by many of the leading characters of the nation, so as to hasten the corruption, that eventually brought about its destruction.

In the East, the sect of Buddha, the Oriental Epicurus, is comparatively of modern origin, and is the offspring, not of uninquiring ignorance, but of philosophy. It sprung up long after the disciples of Bramha had been in possession of the doctrines of atheistic philosophy. An uncreated world, and a perishable soul,—these were not the early doctrines of a rude and



uninstructed state ; — they were the proud discoveries of science, or the impious invention of profligacy, at an enlightened period.

In Europe, to what period will you look for the prevalence of speculative atheism? When will you find it attaining so rank and alarming a growth, as at that very period, which assumed to itself emphatically the title of “the age of reason?” Not when reason was bound, as for ages it had been, in chains of superstition, and the human mind was covered with thick darkness, was this phenomenon exhibited ; but when reason and philosophy, freed from all restraints, were thought to have attained their proudest eminence. It was reserved for those, who, rejecting the light of revelation, professed to put themselves under the guidance of reason alone, to revive in the enlightened eighteenth century the gloomy doctrines of the ancient atheism ; to be satisfied with the account of a creation without a creator, an infinite effect without a cause, the eternal sleep of death, a soul to perish with the body.

The use of such views and representations as have now been given should be, not to teach us to undervalue reason and the light of nature ; but to give us a juster sense of their true value ; to teach us how far and in what respects they are to be relied upon, what limits there are to their sufficiency, and with what readiness and thankfulness we should accept whatever aid is offered to supply their deficiency. They furnish some support at least to the credibility of a revelation from God to supply the wants of nature.

And as religion is of unspeakable importance to every human being, involving the highest interests of every individual of the great family of men ; any instruction in divine things, which claims to be of divine origin, asserting God to be its author, and professing to teach the doctrine of eternal life, may well be expected to have the evidences faithfully examined, upon which are founded its claims.

## CHAPTER II.

## A REVELATION SUSCEPTIBLE OF PROOF.

**IF** there be a Revelation from God, there can be no doubt that it must be susceptible of satisfactory proof, —such proof as we deem a sufficient ground of a reasonable faith.

Now, that a Revelation from God is not in itself an incredible thing, so as to be incapable of proof by any kind of evidence, is probably an opinion from which none will dissent. There will be no question whether He who created the mind of man can have access to it, so as to make communications of knowledge to it, in another way than by the natural and usual operation of its faculties. Of those who deny or doubt its reality, none, I presume, will deny its possibility, or pretend that it implies a contradiction or an absurdity. By one of the most eminent skeptics of the last century, \* it has been readily admitted, that “an extraordinary action of God on the mind, which the word inspiration is now used to denote, is not more inconceivable than the ordinary action of mind on body, or of body on mind.” It is, then, in itself, and previous to experience, as credible that the one should take place as the other. Our belief, therefore, of its having

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\* Bolingbroke, Works, Vol. II. p. 468.

taken place, or not, must depend solely on the nature and degree of the proof by which the fact, as such, is supported. And what is there to prevent such proof being given to him, to whom such communication is made, as to assure him that it is from God, and not from any other source ; that it is not a delusion ? Surely, He who framed the mind, and gave it all its natural powers, can be at no loss for the means of doing this in a manner perfectly effectual.

If, for example, one were to find himself endowed with the spirit of prophecy, and the power of miracles, it is certain that he must feel just the same assurance that the supernatural light, of which he was conscious, was from the fountain of light, as that the supernatural powers, with which he found himself endowed, were from the source of all power. That is, he would be absolutely certain that both alike were derived from the same source ; a power capable of controlling the laws of nature, therefore equal to that by which those laws were first established.

Now, this is precisely what we are assured took place in respect to those "holy men of God," who have given to the world that system of revealed truth which is contained in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. They were not left to mistake the dreams of a heated imagination for divine inspiration ; nor did they propose to others what they had thus been taught, as messages from heaven, without clear evidence to themselves, and such as they could exhibit with convincing power to others, that they were so in reality.

When Moses, for example, received from the Most

High his commission to be the guide and deliverer of his people, there was first the prodigy of the burning bush, and the voice addressed to him in the name of Jehovah. And to assure him that this wonderful appearance was not a delusion, and that God would indeed support him in the high service to which he was called, a supernatural power was communicated to him, which he was directed then to exercise, and to repeat the exhibition of it in the presence of Pharaoh and his court. Besides this instant proof of a divine commission, a further test was appointed, which was to depend upon the success of the great and hazardous enterprise upon which he was sent, and the full accomplishment of its purpose. "And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God in this mountain."

Now, it is obvious that in any case, as in this, a real revelation from God may be accompanied with such circumstances of evidence as certainly to distinguish it, to him to whom it is communicated, from all delusion. When the supernatural effects took place at the word of the Jewish prophet, and when, in conformity with the prophetic promise, he worshipped God with his people at the appointed spot,—he could have no more doubt of his own divine mission than of any fact whatever.

Nor is reality less capable of being distinguished from *imposture* than from delusion. That it is a message from God, may be proved as clearly to those to

whom it is afterward published, as to him who first received it. He who comes, professing to be a messenger from God, with communications of His will, if, in attestation of his authority and his mission, he give sensible and unequivocal exhibitions of supernatural power, — doing that which no man could do by his own natural powers, — such an one gives as satisfactory proof to others that what he teaches is from God, as he has himself. And so it was, that Moses and the prophets, Jesus and his apostles, did prove to the men of their age that they were sent by God.

When Moses offered himself to the children of Israel as their leader and deliverer, had he only given them his own word that he had a commission from God, giving no sensible proof of the divine power and presence accompanying the enterprise; it might have been reasonably suspected, that he was either a fanatic, who had mistaken the dreams of his own imagination for a divine impulse, or an ambitious man, who would avail himself of the pretence of a divine mission to accomplish his ambitious purposes. But his miracles in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, placed him above all suspicion of imposture, as they also furnished unquestionable proof, that he was not himself imposed upon by the artifice of others, nor by his own imagination. These miracles were of such a nature, and were performed in such circumstances, that the magicians themselves were constrained to acknowledge in them “the finger of God.” It was in this full conviction that the nation of Israel submitted to the laws and institutions, which he professed to have re-

ceived for them from God ; a conviction that he was commissioned from above to do what he did, and to teach what he taught.

Our Saviour, also, appealed to the works which he performed as decisive proof of his divine mission, and of the divine authority of what he taught. "The works which I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not ; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works." That is, though ye believe not me, on my mere word, believe me on account of the works, which I perform in my Father's name and by power derived from him. And in this he seems to have appealed to a principle that was fully recognised among the Jews ; for, when he had given sight to one born blind, and the Jews, notwithstanding the clear evidence of the fact, still refused to give credit to his claims as a divine messenger, the man himself, on whom the miracle was performed, expressed his surprise at the inconsistency. "Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing."

We have here an appeal to the common understanding of the Jews. Nor is it to that of the Jews only. All, who have reflected at all upon the subject, will admit that God only can confer the power of controlling or suspending the course of nature ; so that he who does it must be from God.

But if a revelation from God may be made certain to him, to whom it is first delivered ; and if he can

communicate it to others with satisfactory evidence of his authority to do it ; can there be any reason to doubt, that, being thus promulgated, it may be propagated to others, and transmitted down to other generations, in such a manner, as to lay a reasonable foundation for faith in it as the truth of God ? For, as any fact, not in itself absolutely impossible, is susceptible of satisfactory proof at the time of its taking place ; so is it certain also, that it may be transmitted through any length of time with such circumstances of historical evidence, as to leave no reasonable ground for rejecting its truth. In this, it is not implied, that historical evidence is infallible ; or that human testimony is to be relied upon implicitly. But, whatever deductions are to be made, they have their limitation ; there are rules of judging, by which the value of human testimony, however ancient, may be estimated with sufficient accuracy to make it, in religion, as in other things, a reasonable ground of faith.

In examining the records contained in books of high antiquity, a large extent of knowledge indeed is required, laborious inquiry, critical skill, and a faithful application of the laws of just criticism, in order to fix the exact value of their claims ; and in order to distinguish the genuine and authentic, from the spurious and doubtful.

Now with respect to profane writings of the earliest ages, this has been done by the learned in such a manner, as to draw, with considerable distinctness, the line, which separates authentic history from fable ; which distinguishes what we are to admit, from what we



ought to reject. In facts of great importance, the bounds of truth and of error are clearly determined; and in ancient writings, which are so far interesting as to have engaged the attention and called forth the researches of the learned, there is usually little difficulty in obtaining satisfaction as to their genuineness, and as to the credit due to what they contain.

So important are the facts related in those Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and so interesting the doctrines taught in them, that far more attention has been bestowed upon them, than upon any other ancient writings, for the purpose of preserving their purity, and transmitting them uncorrupted, and of ascertaining and proving the justice of the claim of the doctrines they contain to a divine origin. The attention thus bestowed on them, both by those who receive them as oracles of truth, and by those who have wished to invalidate their authority, has contributed greatly to the means of ascertaining the degree of credit, to which they are entitled.

If then the marks, which might be expected to attend a revelation from God, shall be found actually to accompany that, which is the subject of our inquiry, — upon a fair investigation of all the circumstances, which have accompanied its origin, its introduction into the world, its progress and success, the truths it reveals, the duties it inculcates, and the characters and examples of those, by whom it was first propagated, — its authority will be fairly established, and no good reason can be assigned, why it should not be received.

At present I close with a single remark on the

nature and force of the general evidence for a divine revelation, compared with that, which we have for the great truths and principles of Natural Religion.

Why do we believe in those great truths ; the very first of them, for example, the existence of an intelligent Author of nature ? Is it not this only,—because we can upon no other hypothesis account for what we see ? Could we otherwise account for the existence of the Universe, should we have recourse to what is so utterly incomprehensible to us, as the existence of an eternal, uncreated, uncaused, invisible being, as its Author ? Now, in the same manner as the Universe itself is a standing proof of the being of God, its creator, and of the leading truths of natural religion ; so there is a variety of present appearances, which are standing evidences of the reality of a divine revelation, and of the truth of its principal doctrines. For, the phenomena which we witness can upon no other supposition be all satisfactorily accounted for, but that of the Supreme Being having interposed in the government of the world, in the manner in which the history of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures declare, that he has in fact done. It is as impossible, upon any other hypothesis, to account for the known state of the world, past and present, as to account for the existence and phenomena of the Universe, without the supposition of an intelligent Author. In this case, as in the other, the phenomena exist. The truth of the historical records of our religion accounts for them. Let him attempt to account for them, who denies their truth.

## CHAPTER III.

WHAT PROOFS WOULD BE A REASONABLE GROUND  
OF FAITH.

It is of great importance in all inquiries, and not less so on the subject of religion than on other subjects, to settle the proper grounds of faith. Faith is a duty and a virtue; but, to be either the one or the other, its object must be right, and the evidence competent on which it rests. Credulity is at the same time as wrong and as mischievous, as incredulity. Its result is in fact the same; for by the very same act, by which you receive error for truth, you reject truth as error. The same act, which without evidence or against it receives this as truth, while it is not so, must reject the contrary, which is the real truth.

The Christian's faith, that it may be a pious and commendable act, must be a reasonable one; he must be satisfied that it has a reasonable foundation, that it stands on competent evidence; he must be able to say confidently with the Apostle, "I know in whom I have believed."

As far as the light of nature conducts us, we walk with perfect confidence and perfect security, for we know it cannot mislead us. It is the finger of God directing us, it is the voice of God speaking to us. We may carelessly or perversely misunderstand and misinterpret, what is presented to our senses; but however we may distrust our own fidelity in receiving

and using the information, we can have no doubt as to the correctness of the information itself. Innumerable marks of contrivance and design in the creation leave us in no uncertainty, as to an intelligent Author of nature ; nor can we have any doubt — as far as we find by the constitution of nature and in the regular course of things, that our condition is affected by our conduct,—that one course of actions tends to happiness and another to misery,— that in this tendency we have the expression of the will of the Creator, who has so appointed the constitution of things, and thus declared what are the objects of his approbation and his displeasure.

All notices of the divine will, and intimations of human duty thus written on the face of nature, or inscribed on our hearts, we receive with unhesitating confidence. For we know, that the language of nature is the language of the God of nature, and that that reason by which we understand and interpret it, and that conscience by which we judge what is right and wrong in actions, are his gift and his voice speaking within us ; being the faculties by which we must ascertain what his will is, in whatever way and by whatever means it is made known to us.

Now if other truths, in addition to those thus discovered in the works of God, and other intimations of the divine will, enlarging the sphere of our duty, be declared to have been given to mankind by a revelation, we are entitled to demand of him who proposes them to us, satisfactory proof, that they are a revelation from God. We have a right to know in whom

we are called upon to believe. We are authorized to require as satisfactory evidence, that what we are called upon to receive as a revelation from God is actually from him, as we have, that reason and conscience and the frame of nature are from him.

When, therefore, doctrines or rules of life, purporting to be a revelation from God, are proposed, previous to the discussion of their individual claims, and the examination of the direct proofs of their being a revelation, there are three questions, that will fairly come before us.

I. Is a Revelation in itself, and under any circumstances, credible? that is, is it capable of being supported, so that it ought to be received, by any kind or degree of evidence, with which it may be accompanied? For, if it can be shown, that a revelation from God is in itself absolutely incredible, our inquiry is stopped in the outset, and we can be under no obligation to waste our time in examining the particular claims of any pretence to a revelation, or the proofs with which it is offered.

II. In the second place, if the result of the former inquiry be, that a revelation is not in itself incredible, but, like any other possible fact, is capable of being supported by competent evidence, and may be a reasonable subject of faith; what must be its attributes to make it so, and without which it could not be received?

III. In the third place, supposing a pretended revelation to possess the attributes, which must belong to

one, which has God for its author, with what evidence must it be accompanied?

With respect to the first and the last of these, I will not suppose it necessary to add anything to what was said in the last chapter. I will suppose it to be admitted, that a revelation from God is not a thing in itself incredible, and that if one were actually given, it must be as capable of satisfactory proof, as any other matter of fact. I will presume also, that the views which have been given of what human reason has actually done, the extremely defective and corrupt systems that have prevailed, whenever men have been left to its sole guidance, are sufficient to show, that a revelation from God was highly desirable; that to a very large proportion of men it was even necessary in order to their having any just and competent views of the principal doctrines, and of the obligations of natural religion.

I shall, therefore, confine myself now to the second question. What must be the attributes of a revelation, what the characteristics, without which its divine origin could not be supported, but which, accompanying the pretence of a revelation, would make it a proper subject of inquiry, to be received or rejected upon its own proper evidence?

We certainly know, that in a revelation from God, nothing immoral, nothing absurd, nothing contradictory to reason can be taught. Not anything immoral,—for that would contradict the clearest and best notions we are able to obtain of his character and will by the light of nature, which we know is from him; and it

is utterly incredible, that by one set of instructions he should lead us to a contrary opinion of his character, from what he had before given us by another; and, besides that, one that contradicts all the feelings and the notices, which he has impressed on our own nature. Not anything absurd or contradictory to reason,—for the reason he has implanted in us, which is our only guide, and by which alone we can judge of any instructions that are offered, and all that we see of the other works of God convince us, that he is himself the most perfect reason, and that nothing contradictory to reason can come from him.

If then we be called upon to receive a doctrine, as from God, which is clearly of immoral tendency, representing God as an impure, or cruel, or unjust being, as delighting in rites of worship that are impure and cruel, and inculcating a correspondent morality; we can be under no obligations to examine the evidence on which its claims are founded, since it carries in its very face intrinsic proofs, that it cannot be from God. We are authorized from its internal character alone, to pass by unnoticed any external evidence to which it may appeal.

Thus, the ancient philosophers were not bound to examine carefully the pretensions of the several forms of the popular religion to a divine original. They were authorized to reject them without further inquiry, when they discovered in their representations of the Author of nature, of the rule of duty, of the motives of action, in the whole moral tendency of the system, clear contradictions of what was taught by the light

of nature, or decisive marks of folly and absurdity ; for the same reason that it can now be no part of our duty to examine the external proofs of the modern systems of paganism, while they present in their very substance and texture the marks, that they cannot have proceeded from the same being, who is the author of our moral nature, and who gave us that reason, by which alone we are to judge of their character and their claims.

Must the Christian, who visits Hindostan, before he rejects a religion, that sacrifices the wife on the funeral pile of the husband, and teaches the mother, as an act acceptable to God, to toss her infant to the crocodile in the Ganges, — must he so examine the grounds of the faith that requires this, as to be able to detect its imposture, and show its defect of external proof? In Japan, must he institute a laborious investigation of the historical proofs, upon which rests the worship of the great image and its thirty three thousand attendant images in the Temple of Jeddo, in order to be justified in neglecting to join in the worship? In Tartary, when he is called upon to worship the Grand Lama, may he not dismiss the subject, and decline all inquiry into historical proofs, under the convictions, that no historical evidence can prove him to be the eternal God, creator and governor of all worlds, who appears in the form, and is subject to the infirmities of a man ; — who grows old and dies like other men, and is perpetuated only by a reputed transition from one human body to another ?

But while, on the one hand, there may be thus



decisive internal marks to set aside the claims of a religion to a divine origin; we are not able, on the other hand, to say with equal confidence, by what positive marks of a divine origin such a religion will in fact be attended. Though we may say with certainty what it cannot contain, it is not in our power with the same certainty to say what it will contain.

When, therefore, a book is offered to us purporting to contain a revelation from God, declared to have been written by persons authorized by God himself to give us important instructions, to reveal his will, make known his purposes, publish his laws, and teach his true worship, and calling upon us to receive it as a divine revelation; if it present not the decisive marks of imposture, which have been mentioned, we are bound to listen to its claims, to examine its evidences, and to receive or reject it on its own proper proofs.

In pursuing this examination, there are a few cautions, which we ought to carry with us to prevent a wrong judgment.

In the first place, we are not to conclude immediately, because the doctrine is reasonable, and the precepts are agreeable to our best natural notions of a pure morality, that they therefore must have been from God in the sense, that the terms, Divine Revelation imply. The inference would be unauthorized. That is still to be determined by direct and positive proof; and however reasonable an opinion may be, and however useful and important we may think it, and however confident we may feel of its truth, the

question whether it be a part of revelation, must still stand on its own proper proof. So also as to the contents of a book purporting to be a divine revelation, or a whole system of doctrines and duties. Their being perfectly reasonable and highly important is no proof that they are actually a revelation from God. This circumstance shows, that there is no intrinsic incredibility; it shows also, that there is some presumption, if he, who delivers them, solemnly declares them not to have been his own discovery or invention, but a divine revelation, that they are so in reality; still, however, it is a presumption which will amount to nothing, if there be the entire absence of positive proof, or even a great deficiency of proof.

Thus, however perfect the institutions of Moses had been, and however excellent, and of salutary tendency the moral system he taught; and though they had been far more perfect, and better suited to the most important ends, than anything before known; yet, had they been accompanied with no sensible proofs of a divine interposition in their promulgation, there would have been no just reason for acknowledging their claims and admitting their authority. The same may be said with respect to the instructions of our Saviour. Had he wrought no miracles, had no prophecies received their accomplishment in his person and the circumstances of his life, and had he delivered no prophecies, that were afterward fulfilled, — however his doctrines might have claimed our assent as valuable truths, and his precepts deserved to be received as rules of life, they would have had no

peculiar authority. I state this, because an inaccuracy of expression on this subject is sometimes made use of, which leads to wrong apprehensions of the nature and force of that part of the internal evidence of our religion, which consists in the perfection of its instructions ; and the insisting on its proving more than it actually does, has a tendency to lead to the denial of the weight to which it is in fact entitled.

On the other hand, we are not authorized to pronounce, that a doctrine cannot be of divine revelation, because it is either more or less elevated than we should have expected ; and that a system of instructions cannot be from God, because it does not contain what our notions of the divine character would have led us to expect ; or because they are conveyed in a different manner, and with a different degree of clearness, from what our judgment would have directed, and our opinion of what the wisdom or the goodness of God would require.

It has been most justly and forcibly remarked, and a correct view of the limitation of our faculties can hardly leave us in doubt of it, that we are incompetent judges, previous to experience, of what were to be expected in a revelation from God. It is to set up human reason to judge of the divine conduct ; a finite and imperfect being to prescribe rules to him, whose understanding is infinite. We accordingly set ourselves, not to inquire what is the actual state of things, not to examine what the measures of the divine administration have been, but to determine what they ought to be ; not to ascertain what instruc-

tions God has actually given, but to say what he should have given. This rashness and presumptuousness of proceeding takes place whenever we decide from a previous standard we had fixed in our minds of the divine wisdom and goodness, whether a doctrine or an institution offered to our acceptance be of divine authority. And it has place still more frequently, in our interpretation of a doctrine, and fixing the meaning of a book, after the first question as to its divine authority is settled. In each case we bring to the examination our previous prejudices. We come prepared, not to see what lies before us in its true shape, color, and dimensions, but in those which had before been impressed on our imagination; and in what fantastic forms the plainest objects may thus be seen, fact and experience too plainly tell us.

If we will bring with us to our inquiries a more humble mind, less disposed to dictate, and better inclined to learn, they will be attended with better success. We shall, in the first instance, not refuse to examine the credentials of a divine messenger, because the message he brings is not exactly what we should have expected; nor reject for a similar reason, the authority of a system of instructions, purporting to be doctrines of revelation, and offered as such to our consideration. We shall think it reasonable to judge of their authority on the ground of evidence, and not on that of opinion.

And when we afterward proceed from the question respecting the authority, to that which relates to the meaning of the instructions that are offered; instead

of seeking to find or to make a meaning, which we had before determined that they must contain, the same state of mind will teach us to make it our single endeavor to discover, what is the true meaning that they do express ; and to receive that meaning and be satisfied with it, whether it was what we expected to find, or what we wished to find, or the reverse. Recollecting always, that neither our expectation nor our wishes, neither our wisdom nor our sense of fitness and propriety, can be supposed to be the exact measure of the divine counsels and the divine proceedings ; that it is perfectly credible, however it may humble our self-sufficiency to think so, — perfectly credible, that the ways of God may not be as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE CONNEXION OF THE CHRISTIAN WITH  
PRECEDING REVELATIONS.

WE can have but an imperfect view of either the foundation of Christianity, its origin, or its nature and design, while we confine ourselves to the consideration of the Christian scheme, as independent and standing alone, and the revelation of it as separate and distinct, and do not take into our view, that it constituted part of a *series of divine dispensations*.

Jesus Christ himself constantly appealed to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and called the attention of his hearers to the references contained in them to that subsequent part of the series, which he was to introduce. This he did in the synagogue at Capernaum, when he applied to himself the passage of the prophecy which he had just read, as a part of the synagogue service of the day. He did it in his conversation with the woman at the well of Sychar, when he declared himself to be the Messiah whom she expected. He did it less directly, but not less clearly, in his Sermon on the Mount, when he declared that he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law ; in several of his parables ; and in some of his conversations with the Jews. We find the connexion of Christianity with the preceding dispensations not less expressly declared, nor less frequently referred to, by his apostles. Such was

the speech of Peter, on the day of Pentecost, Stephen's defence before the Jewish high priest, and Paul's before King Agrippa. We find something of it in almost every one of Paul's Epistles ; and of that to the Hebrews it makes the principal subject, and is the very basis.

It is a remarkable circumstance attending the Christian revelation, that we are thus to seek beyond itself for a complete understanding of the scheme itself, for its origin, and for an important part of the proofs on which it rests.

1. Thus, if we are tracing back its history, we are not to stop at the coming of Jesus Christ, and the transactions of his life. The whole of his history has relation to something before. It looks back through many ages and generations. Not only does it carry us back in the line of ancestry to the family of David, the tribe of Judah, the nation of Israel, the stock of Abraham ; it follows up the line to Noah, the second father of the human family, and thence pursues its track along through the race of antediluvian patriarchs, till it ends in the first created pair, the progenitors of the human race.

Now, were there nothing more, nothing beyond this line of ancestry, it were a circumstance of little value. But this is the smallest and least considerable peculiarity, that arrests our attention. There is a relation of far more importance than the line of natural descent, between the founder of our faith and the doctrine he taught, and the antecedent history of the world. It is that of a part to the whole series of the divine

dispensations. It is the completion of a progressive scheme, the perfection of a vast design, all the preceding parts of which, various, complicated, distant, and widely separated, are yet intimately connected, mutually dependent; and each individually, as well as the whole, necessary to that consummation which it received in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

2. If again we consider the scheme of Christianity itself, we must do it in connexion with its history, its origin, and its parentage. We have a wrong apprehension of the subject, if we suppose Christianity, in its main features and its principal doctrines, to be new and different from all that was taught in preceding dispensations. Not only is it the perfection of reason, and the religion of nature, separated from its corruptions, restored to its purity, and taught with authority; it is the same doctrine, in its fundamental points, that was known to the patriarchs, that made the basis of the Mosaic institution, that was taught by the prophets, that imparted a spirit and gave a character to all the sacred writings of the Jewish people.

Our Lord taught no new doctrine respecting the Author of nature and Lord of the universe. His Father in heaven, to whom he directs our religious regards, is the same Being, represented under the same images, with the same attributes, exercising the same government, that appears through the whole of the preceding dispensations; that inspired the holy prophets, gave the law to the nation of Israel by Moses, and was worshipped by the patriarchs. And as the object of worship, and of religious trust, was the same,



so also was the worship itself, and the moral system connected with it. Not in the internal character and essential principles, but in the external forms of religion, suited to a maturer age of the world and a more advanced state of it, does Christianity vary from the former institution. It differs, also, in the stress it lays on internal character above external forms,—in the greater clearness it gives to the hopes of the righteous, and the greater strength it imparts to the motives of a holy life. But those hopes and those motives are essentially the same. New light is given to guide, to encourage, and to comfort us ; but no new object of worship, no new terms of acceptance, no new principles of action, no new system of morality, are revealed. These are all the same, which were before taught by Moses and the prophets, and which make up the substance, constitute the spirit, and appear in every part of the writings of the Old Testament.

3. If we now turn our attention to the proofs of Christianity, as a divine revelation, we find it not less closely connected with the dispensations that went before. Jesus proved himself to be a divine messenger, and his doctrine to be a divine revelation, by the miracles which he wrought, and to which he appealed as decisive evidence. But he also declared that he was the particular messenger of God, who had been foretold by a series of prophets, beginning at Moses, and continued through the long period that had intervened, till the last of the prophets, after the return from the captivity. He referred to the Jewish Scrip-

tures in general, to Moses their great lawgiver in particular, and to the other prophets, as testifying of him, — as pointing out his person, his character, his offices, his works, the time of his coming, and the circumstances of his ministry, in such a manner, that a careful examination and a fair comparison would leave them in no doubt of his being the person to whom they referred.

Now, if, when we make this examination, we find the resemblance striking; if we find in the designation of the person of the Messiah, in the character he was to sustain, and the works he was to execute, marks of distinction which appeared in Jesus, but appeared united together in no other; and if they were marks of an extraordinary nature, such as were extremely unlikely to be found united in any one person, — especially if a part of the description related to those very proofs, by which he was to establish his claims as a divine messenger, — it is easy to see to how very great a degree the whole of this will serve to confirm and strengthen the evidence, before highly satisfactory and conclusive.

On this extensiveness of the scheme of revelation, the unity of design that appears running through the whole, the connexion of parts by mutual relation and dependence and importance of design, three remarks are to be made.

In the first place, as to the fact of this relation to preceding dispensations, it may be remarked, that the manner in which it is recognised, and the frequency of allusion to it by our Saviour and his

apostles, furnishes an argument of a peculiar kind, and of considerable force, in support of the claim of Christianity to be a revelation from God. It gives a positive air of sincerity and truth, as it multiplies the instances of coincidence or discrepancy to be observed, and thus furnishes easy means of detection, if the relations, connexions, and dependencies alluded to have no real foundation ; and, on the other hand, if they are found to exist, it goes far to support the whole claim. I observe, that so frank and artless a reference to facts and circumstances, — which will indeed support its claims, if fairly made out, but must be fatal to them, if it fails, — is a mark of sincerity and truth. Impostors are not apt to multiply gratuitously the means of their detection.

Second. But the argument becomes more decisive, when the appeal is answered, and the relation and dependence in question are made out in a satisfactory manner. For the very extent of the scheme furnishes some presumption as to its author, and the counsels in which it originated. So also does the length of time occupied in its progress to perfection, its gradual development, and the relation and dependence of parts so widely distant in time and place, and so various in kind. In these respects it is unlike the inventions of men, and the fictions of imposture. Man is short-sighted, impatient of delay. His views are of narrow extent. His purposes ripen soon, and either come to their perfection or perish. But it is far otherwise with Him, who can see from the beginning to the end of things, whatever be the interval that separates them.

Him no length of time, or distance of place, or variety of objects, acting on each other in an infinite variety of ways, can perplex. None of his designs in the natural or moral world appear to be single. None terminates in itself. Each, when accomplished, becomes in turn a means toward some farther end.

Through what an extensive and complicated chain of intermediate steps do the provisions of the natural world pass, each holding successively the place of means and ends in the progress ; no part terminating in itself, but each necessary to the next succeeding in the series ! We see this exemplified in the manner in which inanimate matter is made to contribute to vegetable life, — this, again, to furnish subsistence to the whole animal race, — and this, in its turn, made subservient to the next superior order in the scale of being, the intellectual and moral creation. In this, as in most other cases, too, the dependence is mutual, each inferior receiving in return some compensation for what it is destined to contribute to the next superior.

Examples, also, occur in the whole history of human improvements. In every part of human knowledge, advancement has been gradual ; by steps each contributing to the next in the series. Nothing has come to perfection at once, but the generations of men have been constantly advancing, each a step beyond the preceding. The faculties themselves, too, as well as the objects on which they are employed, are improved and perfected by culture ; and the higher they are advanced, become the more capable of further advancement.

Systems of government and of education, so important to mankind, were far from being brought to high perfection at an early period, or at once. They were rude and imperfect in their beginnings, slow in their progress ; in every period of time, in every region, in every stage of their growth, answering to the changes in the character and condition of mankind,—and themselves making an important part of those changes.

Thus it is through the whole system of nature ; greatness of plan, and a mutual connexion and dependence of parts remote from each other in time and place, are characteristics. But in the execution of the greatest designs,—and the same also is true of all the subordinate events, which lead to their completion,—there is nothing of haste or impatience,—no indications of the feebleness and fear, which mark human schemes. The successive steps which lead to it are taken deliberately, and the whole advances by a steady and regular progress ; sometimes, indeed, interrupted and suspended, but these interruptions and their corrections so provided for in the original constitution, that no permanent confusion or eventual defeat is ever allowed to take place.

Now, what I would observe, is the resemblance between these characteristics of the whole system of nature, and the scheme of the divine dispensations made known to us in the Scriptures. It furnishes a strong presumption of the same author and origin ; since effects, at once so similar and so remarkable, are to be expected only from a Being

capable of comprehending the whole extent of things, the past, present, and future, at a single view.

This leads me to remark, in the third place, that not only have we the presumption arising from the resemblance itself, which is of no small weight, but from very remarkable and characteristic circumstances, under which this resemblance is discovered ; — circumstances characteristic of a power, intelligence, and foresight far above human, such indeed as can belong only to the Author of nature, or be imparted by him. Such are the circumstances, which have already been mentioned ; namely, unity of design, consistency of plan, adaptation of parts to each other and to the whole, and the same spirit running through a scheme of great extent, carried into execution by the agency of individuals living in ages remote from each other, — each, therefore, performing his part without concert, — yet so as exactly to fill a certain place, to supply the defect of the past, and prepare for something future.

The system of revelation contained in the Scriptures, like the system of nature, we find to be a whole, complete in all its parts ; and which would not be complete were any of its parts omitted. The latter we refer to a single author, though thousands and millions of subordinate agents are employed in its execution. We rightly conclude that all these can be but instrumental agents, for we see that they co-operate in a design far above their comprehension, — many of them, certainly, without the smallest apprehension of the nature, the tendency, or the importance

of the part they are performing. The same, also, for similar reasons, a just view of the subject will induce us to do with respect to the former.

Were it possible that the whole scheme of the divine dispensations, of which the Bible gives an account, might be the invention, and all the writings, in which they are contained, the production of one human mind of great foresight and comprehension, — we have full evidence that it was not so in fact ; since the development was certainly gradual, successive, and in distant ages ; and we have no reason to believe, that either the invention or the execution could have been divided among many, contriving without concert, and acting independently.

If we now consider the successive dispensations, the earlier incomplete in themselves, each looking forward to another, and each subsequent growing out of the preceding, — the patriarchal state, the Mosaic economy, the ministry of the prophets, — all evidently derived from one origin, and all merging at last in the Gospel ; if we consider, too, the series of writers from whom we have our knowledge of the whole course of events, in which revelation is concerned, flourishing, not at once, but in succession, during an interval of more than fifteen centuries, — such the texture of their several accounts, as to remove all suspicion of concert and imposition, and such their coincidence as to give the highest confirmation to each other, as to the leading facts, the great principles, and moral design in which they unite ; — can we doubt whether there was a basis of truth, on which the

whole rested ? Can we find a satisfactory account of all that we see in any hypothesis, which deprives it of that foundation of divine authority, to which it lays claim ?

In vain shall we look for a parallel case. The history of the world furnishes nothing with which to compare it. No such connexion is to be discerned between any other writers of a different kind, appearing in different ages. No such concurrence in one great design of things distant, unlike, and between which there was no other bond of union. In no works, but those of the Author of nature, and to accomplish no purposes but his, shall we find a similar coöperation of numerous agents, through successive ages, each contributing his share, and performing unconsciously his several part to promote the same design. To the Author of nature, then, are we bound to refer, and not to human contrivance, or the will of man, that series of dispensations which revelation makes known.

And when we have made this reference, it will become us next to lend our attention to the contents of those sacred books, which purport to contain a revelation from God ; that we may see what is the spirit, which runs through the whole, and gives a soul and character to distinguish it as from God ; and what are those doctrines, which, making a prominent part of each successive dispensation, may be considered as fundamental, indispensable, and as making the distinguishing features of the Gospel.



## CHAPTER V.

## THE BOOKS OF THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION.

I HAVE stated that there is a connexion between the Christian and preceding dispensations, and of course between the writings of the New Testament, and those of the Old.

That those books, which we now know under the name of the Old Testament, existed in the time of our Saviour, and were held in high estimation by the Jewish nation, as the depositories of their religion, their law, and their history, we see by the manner in which they are constantly alluded to by Christ and his Apostles. We not only learn, that there were such books of peculiar authority ; the titles by which they were known, and the divisions by which they were distinguished, are also recognised. "The Law, and the Prophets, and the Psalms," are mentioned, as a complete enumeration of them.

The Books of the Law, or the "Pentateuch,"—five books ascribed to Moses,—were by his command deposited in the ark of the covenant, and placed in the Tabernacle, under the care of the Priests and Levites. There they were preserved, not only while the nation remained in the wilderness, but after they took possession of the land of Canaan. To the same sacred deposite, also, were consigned the other sacred books, as they successively appeared. When Solc-

mon built the Temple at Jerusalem, the Tabernacle, together with its sacred contents, the ark of the covenant, and the sacred books, were transferred to that building, where they remained till the temple itself was destroyed, and the nation carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

What became of these writings on that event, whether they perished in the flames, or how they were rescued from the conflagration, we have no account. But, that these venerable writings did not share the fate of the temple in which they were lodged, is rendered in some degree probable from this circumstance, that no contemporary or subsequent prophet, in bewailing the calamities of those days, ever mentions their loss, as among the aggravating occasions of public sorrow. They lament their ruined country, their desolate city, and their temple laid waste; but never intimate the loss of those records, which they held most valuable and dear, as among their highest national distinctions.

If, however, the original copies were then destroyed, it is certain that transcripts of them were in existence. We find evidences that they were in being during the captivity. We can hardly doubt, from the manner in which Daniel refers to the Law of Moses and the prophecy of Jeremiah, that he had before him the books in which they were contained. He is represented as consulting them. Immediately after the restoration we find Ezra the Priest employed in restoring the worship agreeably to the ritual of Moses, and in reading and explaining the law to the people.

We find accordingly a copy of the law acknowledged and used as authentic.

It was at this period, — and it could not have been at an earlier, — that the collection of the sacred books was completed. From this time copies of the whole were multiplied. Synagogues were now everywhere erected, where the Law and the Prophets were read every week. A copy of the Scriptures was deposited in every synagogue. And more than two hundred years before the time of our Saviour, they were translated into the Greek language, and copies in that version, as well as of the original Hebrew in the Chaldaic character, were multiplied and widely extended.

Nothing can exceed the reverence which was felt by the nation of Israel for their sacred books, or the respect and care with which they were treated. Not only could no change take place after this as to the number and names of the books composing the sacred Canon; scarcely was it possible for any change to take place in the minutest part of their contents. To secure their absolute integrity and immaculate correctness, the words and syllables and letters of each and every book were numbered; so that it could be immediately discovered if the slightest alteration should take place through the carelessness of a transcriber. It is not pretended, that these precautions have actually succeeded so as to preserve a perfectly literal agreement in all succeeding copies. But they have prevented important errors from being introduced and propagated; they have furnished means and induce-

ments to correct them where they have accidentally crept into single copies; and have thus occasioned the text to be transmitted down with a far greater degree of purity and integrity, than belongs to any other ancient writings, that have been often transcribed.

Another circumstance, contributing to this effect, was the manner in which these writings were read by a whole nation, particularly as a part of the regular service of the Synagogue,—the interest with which they were then heard by the whole body of the people, as containing the most important of all information to them, respecting their laws, civil government, history, and religion. They were not like other writings, read and known by a few only. Every member of the community was intimately acquainted with them. He had been taught portions of the law when a child by his parents, whose duty and practice it was thus early to make their offspring acquainted with the contents of their sacred books; he had once a year, at least, heard the whole read through in the service of the sabbath; and they were still further imprest on his imagination and fixed in his memory, by the several practices which their great Lawgiver had by divine direction prescribed for this purpose.\* Following those directions even in their literal import, as well as in their more just meaning, every Jew was so well acquainted with the holy Scriptures, that it would not be easy to impose upon him a false or a mutilated copy of them, or make him receive as

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\* Deuteronomy, vi. 7-9.

authentic any parts of them, which by carelessness or design had suffered material alterations.

The whole history of the nation serves to verify this remark. Their zeal for their law, and attachment to their sacred writings and institutions, no adversity and no persecutions could ever subdue or lessen. They considered not life itself dear to them, when put in competition with those holy records. They clung to them as the charter of their rights. They gloried in them as their highest national prerogative. They studied them as the fountain and sum of all political, and moral, and religious wisdom.

Thus revered and studied by all, their integrity and purity were carefully guarded by all. And we have the best pledges, that the nature and circumstances of the case will allow, that the Hebrew Scriptures, as they were used in the synagogues at the time of our Saviour, and as they exist at the present day, are substantially the same, as they were, when collected together into one volume by Ezra ; — the same, as to all the purposes of showing what were the history, laws, civil institutions, and religion, appointed by their great lawgiver, and observed by the nation.

The contents of the writings, which were thus received, thus carefully preserved, and thus faithfully transmitted down from age to age, are of the most important and most remarkable kind.

As a History, the portion of time they embrace, and the series of events they record, have no parallel in any other writings. They go back, not only far beyond the authentic records of all other nations ;

they carry us up to the origin of the human race, the beginning of things, the creation of the world itself. By a simple and plain narrative of events in the early ages, they throw light on the innumerable fables into which other nations have run up their early history, and lost themselves in the obscurity and inexplicable mystery of antiquity. They correspond also with the earliest and best accounts of other nations, as far back as those accounts have any claim to authenticity. And they themselves receive no small degree of confirmation as to the most remarkable facts they relate, in the present condition of the earth; in the condition of human society and of the arts of life, as far back as authentic history reaches; and in customs, opinions, and usages, especially of a religious nature, which are found in nations, the most distant and unconnected.

Besides this, the history of the Bible has one feature, which distinguishes it entirely from all others. Everything has a direct relation to the Creator of the world, and his government of it, especially his moral government of men. God is seen in everything that takes place. He it was, that first brought light, and being, and order, out of primeval darkness and confusion. His being, and power, and agency are acknowledged in the original establishment of the order of nature. He is seen in the primitive state of man, in the provision for his animal, intellectual, and moral nature; especially in his moral constitution, the law under which he was placed, and the various dispensations, which mark the progress of his history.

In the mention of the origin of nations, the separation of the tribes and families of men, the designation of the countries allotted to them, the origin of the varieties of language in the several nations of the earth, we find a constant reference to the purposes and providence of the great creator and governor of the world. All is represented as brought about by God, and executing his will ; the whole train of events is a part of his scheme, — a progressive scheme, where new purposes are constantly developing ; and there is a continual tendency, through the whole vast and complicated system, toward the accomplishment of a great moral design, and the attainment of a high and yet unexperienced degree of perfection.

Nor is it only in the beginning of things and the general history of the world, that this constant reference to the providence of God appears. When the history runs into a narrower track, and becomes confined to the interests and events of a single people, the same reference is not less constant and prominent. In the history of the Patriarchs, and the separation of the Jewish people from the rest of mankind ; in all the changes of fortune through which that nation passed, during their pilgrimage in Egypt and in the wilderness, while established in the promised land under laws and institutions appointed by Heaven, in their captivity and removal to a distant land, and their subsequent return to the inheritance of their fathers ; — in all these vicissitudes, there is a continual reference to the great designs of Heaven, and a superintending providence. These events seem to be related not at all for their

own sake, but on account of their influence, and the part they take in the great scheme of the divine dispensation, in the moral government of the world.

Such are the historical records of the Old Testament. But they contain also a system of Religion, and inculcate a scheme of religious truth, connected with a most important religious Institution. The world is represented as sinking into idolatry and gross corruption of manners. The knowledge of the true God was lost in most of the families of men; and a single family was chosen from the rest, separated from their idolatrous neighbors, instructed in the true religion, and taught a pure worship. To them, when become a nation, was given an Institution suited to their infant state, and adapted to the purpose of keeping them uncontaminated with the corruptions, which had overspread all the rest of the world. The design of this institution,—committed to a single people, separated from the rest of the world, fenced around by a ritual, which effectually kept them from intermingling with other people,—seems to have been, in the first place, to preserve what was in danger of soon being entirely lost from among mankind, the knowledge and worship of the true God. In the second place, to serve as the means of extending this knowledge and worship to other people, as in the regular course of things, and progress of the world, they should become capable of receiving it. And, in the third place, thus to prepare the way for the introduction of an institution, suited to a mature state of the world, and adapted to be universal and perpet-



ual, the perfection and completion of all preceding institutions. Such, without entering into a more minute account at present, was the nature and design of the patriarchal doctrine and Mosaic economy, and of the divine interposition in their introduction and establishment.

There is one other view, in which the Scriptures of the Old Testament present themselves to our contemplation ; as containing a system of practical piety and rules of moral conduct, and presenting forms and examples of the most pure and elevated devotion. Besides the collection of Psalms, and a large proportion of the prophetic writings, — which, for rational piety, and a pure and ardent spirit of devotion, founded on the most just views of the divine character and government, have no parallel in any human compositions ;— the same spirit and temper which breathes in them, and the same exalted views of the Author of nature, appear also incidentally in every part of the sacred writings, and impart a spirit, principle, and character to the whole, which distinguish them from all other writings.

With these views of the authority of those writings, and of their general design and contents, I shall next proceed to the inquiry, what is the doctrine which they teach, on some of the most important subjects of religion, particularly, as to the Object of worship, the nature of the worship that God requires, and the conditions on which his favor and approbation are to be obtained.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT RESPECT-  
ING GOD.

WITH respect to the Object of worship, which is our first subject of inquiry, the doctrine of the Old Testament is so frequently and so clearly expressed, that it seems not liable to be mistaken. I do not know, that it has ever been doubted, that the fundamental doctrine of the Old Testament, more clearly and expressly taught than any other is, that the great Author of all things, and object of worship is One, and one only.

There was an obvious reason for this doctrine being thus insisted upon. The great corruption of religion, which rendered a revelation from God necessary, related principally to this doctrine. Whatever was the primitive faith, at a very early period, polytheism was universal. No people upon earth, but the descendants of Abraham, continued to profess the worship of one God. All were worshippers of a multitude of gods. The heavenly bodies, objects of nature, deified men, who had been great conquerors, or legislators, or otherwise eminent benefactors or scourges to their fellow beings, and idols of human fabrication, received the homage of an idolatrous world ; and the Author of nature himself was unknown and unacknowledged.

Hence was it a principal design of the revelation of which we have the records in the books of the Old Testament, to teach the divine unity ; to instruct men in the worship of one God, the eternal, unchangeable, almighty Maker, and Sovereign of the world, the only invisible object of the homage of men ; and to draw them off from the imagination, that different beings preside over different parts of nature, or that good and evil spring from different and independent sources, and that the mixture of good and evil, which is seen in the universe, is to be traced to two self-existent, independent, and opposite principles.

Of the manner, in which this great and fundamental doctrine is taught, it will be necessary only to give a very few out of almost numberless examples, which are to be met with in all parts of the Scriptures. It is recognised in the first of the ten commands, which were promulgated from Sinai ; — “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” It was repeated with a peculiar emphasis by Moses in a solemn exhortation to the people, which, it is worthy of remark, was quoted by our Lord himself with singular solemnity, as a preface to the first and most important of all the commands ; — “Hear O Israel ! the Lord our God is one Lord.” \*

To this one God is attributed the creation of all things throughout the universe. The very objects of the heathen worship themselves, even the most splendid and exalted of them, are expressly mentioned as

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\* Deut. vi. 4 ; Mark xii. 29.

the work of his forming hand, and subservient to the purposes of his government. His absolute property in the whole of his creation, and sovereign right to its entire disposal is also expressed in the strongest terms. He is addressed as "the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth."\* "The greatness, the glory and majesty," are declared to be his. Indeed his greatness and majesty, his universal dominion and supremacy are so often and variously expressed in the prophetic writings, that to transcribe them all would be to transcribe a large proportion of those writings.

It was a prevalent opinion in the ancient Heathen world, that certain deities presided over the several nations of the earth, each having under its patronage and tutelary care one particular country; and that the prosperity of each, and especially its military power and national superiority, depended on the superiority of its tutelary divinity to those of the neighboring states. The Assyrian Monarch accordingly, when he was come to invade Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah, relied solely on this argument to persuade the inhabitants not to resist his power, against which the gods of none of the surrounding countries had been able to protect their worshippers.

In the prayer of Hezekiah on this occasion,† we find his hope, and that of the nation, supported against their arrogant and impious invader, by a pious recurrence to the fundamental doctrines of their religion,

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\* Gen. xiv. 22.

† Isaiah xxxvii.

that Jehovah, their God, was supreme over all the kingdoms of the earth, not merely the patron of their single nation ; and that the reason why the kings of Assyria were enabled to lay waste the several countries of whose conquest they boasted, and to destroy their gods was, that they “were no gods, but wood and stone, the work of men’s hands.”

To repel the notion, so prevalent in the East, of an evil principle, the source of all the natural and moral evil which we see, intelligent, self-existent, and independent of the Author of good, we find something in almost every one of the sacred writers.

Good and evil are uniformly represented as proceeding from the same hand. Job, when subjected to extreme suffering, piously exclaims, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”\* And a Jewish prophet asks, in respect to public calamities, “Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?”†

But the most striking allusion to this sentiment, and direct refutation of it, is in the address of the Almighty himself to Cyrus in the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah. “I am the Lord, and there is none else ; there is no God beside me. I form the light and create darkness ; I make peace, and create evil ; I, the Lord, do all these things.” There can be no doubt, that these expressions were directed purposely against the doctrine of the Persian Magi, which taught that light and darkness, good and evil were dispensed not by the

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\* Job ii. 10.

† Amos iii. 6.

same hand, but received their origin from opposite and independent sources. In correspondence with these declarations, we find, through the whole course of the Scripture history, a uniform ascription of all events, the most calamitous, as well as the most prosperous, relating alike to individuals and to nations, to the superintending providence of one God, the sole sovereign and proprietor of the universe, and disposer of all events. In all instances the Scripture representation of events and their causes is such, as to leave a clear and distinct impression, that blessings and calamities, rewards and punishments, good and evil are dispensed to mankind by the same hand, and designed alike to accomplish the purposes of the same Almighty and beneficent being.

Nothing can be more strong and emphatic than the language of Scripture, which attributes absolute infinity to the Deity, as it relates to time, space, power, and knowledge.

Is eternity an attribute of the Deity? He is declared to be "God from everlasting to everlasting;"\* an expression which seems to imply, as clearly at least as any that could be employed, duration without beginning and without end; and consequently to infer, also, self-existence, since that, which had no beginning, could have had no cause of its being, out of or prior to itself.

Is omnipresence one of the attributes of God? Hear the language of the holy Scriptures. "Behold

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\* Psalm xc. 2.

the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.”\* “Am I a God, at hand, saith the Lord, and not afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I should not see him? do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?”†

That supreme Intelligence, which is omnipresent, must also be omniscient. In what strong and lively language is this sentiment expressed. “He looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heavens.”‡ “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”§

To express almighty power, what language can be conceived more lofty and magnificent than that, in which the sacred writers constantly apply this attribute to God! It is not merely, nor is it chiefly, in the direct ascription of omnipotence. It is in the manner in which they speak of the works of creation and providence. When they speak of him as creating the heavens and the earth, and giving life to all the beings that inhabit them, as appointing the ordinances of heaven, directing the seasons, providing sustenance for man and beast, prescribing bounds to the seas, measuring their waters in “the hollow of his hand, meting out the heavens with a span, comprehending the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighing the mountains in scales.”|| When they describe him as “laying the foundations of the earth, stretching out the heavens like a curtain, making the clouds his

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\* 1 Kings viii. 27. † Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. ‡ Job xxviii. 24.

§ Prov. xv. 3. || Isaiah xl. 12, &c.

chariots, and walking on the wings of the wind." \* And when they represent all the nations of the earth before him, with all their imaginary greatness, vast interests, and mighty revolutions, as but "a drop of the bucket, as the mere dust of the balance."

Of the Moral perfections not less, than the Natural attributes of the Deity, we find a full account in the sacred writers. Holiness, Goodness, Mercy, and Veracity are ascribed to him in absolute perfection. Besides those direct declarations, which are to be found in almost every page of the prophetic writings, these attributes are most clearly and strongly implied in the whole of the sacred books.

The Holiness of God is manifested in his requiring holiness of his creatures, in the expressions of his displeasure at all impurity and wickedness, in his approbation of good men, and the happiness he has provided for those, who imitate him in this perfection. His Goodness is expressed, beyond what could be learned from the mere observation of the provision he has made for the well being of all creatures, in assurances of the kind intention and benevolent tendency of all the evils which befall men. The only objection to the perfect goodness of God is thus removed. The uniform and constant declarations, that "God afflicts not willingly," but for purposes of paternal correction; that he pities, as a father his children, those whom he corrects, correcting for their good; and in general, that he overrules all things for good, not only exter-

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\* Psalm civ. 2, 3, 4.



nal calamities, but even the corrupt passions of wicked men, so as to make them instrumental in accomplishing his benevolent purposes ;—are such assurances of the divine goodness, as are peculiar to Revelation, such as natural religion cannot furnish.

Of his Mercy, besides the express declarations of all the sacred writers, the great scheme of mercy, which they have revealed, by which pardon and salvation are offered to penitent sinners, is a sufficient testimony. To his Veracity and Faithfulness they bear witness in recording the exact correspondence of his dealings with his declarations, and the fulfilment of his promises and execution of his threatenings, according to the expressed or implied conditions with which they were accompanied.

These attributes and perfections of the Deity are so familiar to our minds, and so inseparably associated with our notion of God, that we are not sufficiently impressed by the uniformity and consistency, with which the divine character is represented throughout the sacred writings. To be duly impressed by the fact, that in the whole history, in all the devotional and poetic effusions, in the bold prophetic images, nothing should escape any one of the sacred writers, inconsistent with any one of the divine perfections, we must compare these representations of the divine nature and character, not with the sentiments now entertained on these subjects by us living under the light of the Gospel, but with the representations of contemporary writers. Compare in this point the poets of Greece and Rome with the poets of Israel. Let the Jupiter

of Homer and Virgil be placed beside the Jehovah of the Jewish prophets, and you perceive at once the infinite distance between the one and the other. Will you say that as poets, Homer and Virgil have introduced the vulgar superstitions and popular opinions of the age? The reply is, that David, Isaiah, and the Author of the book of Job were also poets; and it is equally true of them, that their representations of the divine character and government were in exact conformity with the prevailing opinions of their nation, taught by the ministers of their religion, and constituting the popular faith; not that of the philosophers only, but of the common people.

Compare the prophets of Israel with the poets and the philosophers of Greece and Rome, and the historians of the Bible with the pagan historians, with a single view to their representations of the divine character,—and you can hardly need a stronger proof of the divine origin and inspiration of the former.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE MORAL CHARACTER OF THE MOSAIC  
INSTITUTION.

OUR next inquiry relates to the Moral character of the Mosaic Institution. This we find set forth in the following passage, which seems intended for a summary of religious duty, as taught by the Jewish lawgiver in the institution which he delivered to the nation of Israel. "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul; to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good." In reading this passage, the following remarks are what strike us as deserving particular notice.

1. That the religion of the Old Testament is not, as is too apt to be represented, a mere religion of rites, and ceremonies, and external forms; but a religion of the heart, in which the affections are concerned and have a principal share. What is required is, "to fear the Lord, and to love him, and to serve him, with all the heart, and with all the soul."

2. That the service of God under that Institution consists in obedience; not in direct acts of worship only, but in the observance of all those rules for the

regulation of moral conduct, which are prescribed in the law ; expressed by "walking in his ways, and keeping the commandments and the statutes, which he has appointed."

3. That in all that is required under the Jewish dispensation, the best interest and happiness of men are the motive and end ; "Which I command thee this day for thy good."

I. In the first place, the religion of the Old Testament is a religion of the heart, in which the affections are concerned, and have a principal share.

I think it not unimportant to place this on its true grounds, since a very different representation is sometimes given, and is probably generally received. From our Saviour's invectives against the hypocrisy, formality, and merely ritual obedience of the Scribes and Pharisees of his day ; and the reasoning of St. Paul in his Epistles against the obligation of Christians to observe the law of Moses, and the comparisons he was led into of that institution with Christianity ; it has been too hastily and carelessly inferred, that the Mosaic institution is a mere religion of rites, with little if anything in it of a spiritual and moral nature. This inference would have been avoided by considering, that the reproofs of our Saviour were directed not against the law itself, but the perversion and abuse of it ; that he declared the design of his doctrine to be not to destroy, but to fulfil it ; and that while its moral design was chiefly to be regarded, its ritual services were not to be neglected ; and that the reasonings of Paul were directed, not to the disparagement of the

law, as a moral system, but against extending the obligation of its ritual to converts to Christianity. Of its spirit and moral design he speaks respectfully, and would hardly have mentioned it as an introduction to Christianity, a preparatory institution, a "school-master to bring men to Christ," had he considered its spirit and design so entirely different from that of the Gospel.

Our direct and positive proof, that the religion of the Old Testament is a religion of the heart and affections is drawn, first, from the moral part of the Mosaic Law.

The text just quoted is far from being the only passage, in which it is clearly asserted. In a passage, which our Saviour himself declared to be the first command of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might;" and in another, which by the same authority we are taught to consider as second in point of importance only to the last mentioned, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;"—in these we have a distinct and emphatic declaration, that the affections of the heart, the principle of action more than the act itself, the motive rather than the external deed,—is primarily regarded in that institution.

The same appears in the Decalogue, according to any reasonable understanding of those commands; and in two of them, the fifth and the tenth, no specific external act is the subject either of command or inhibition, or is even mentioned. "Thou shalt honor

thy father and thy mother," and "thou shalt not covet," relate directly only to the affections of the heart, and are equally applicable to any part of that external conduct, in which the motive of filial piety, or the principle of selfishness may operate.

What appears in the Law of Moses, is seen also in the whole course of the Sacred History, and in the injunctions and the denunciations of the prophets. Not external specific acts of duty or of disobedience are alone or chiefly regarded, but the dispositions and motives with which they are performed. The fear of God, as a principle and a motive of obedience, holiness of heart and purity of affections, sincerity, integrity, uprightness, justice, and kindness,—these internal states, not less than the external acts, which are to flow from them and to be the evidence of their existence, are constantly inculcated.

In the same manner, do we find the promises addressed to the patriarchs, those in the Law of Moses, and those by which the prophets endeavored to encourage to repentance, obedience, and virtue, having reference, like the commands, not less to the internal principle than to the external act. The fear of God, the love of his character and his law, the right direction of the affections, the regulation of the passions and desires, holiness of heart, sincerity and uprightness; to these are annexed the promises of the Jewish law, and to these are made the offers of the divine favor, friendship, and various blessings.

One more direct proof we draw from the acts of Worship, in which its writings abound. Where else

shall we meet with a purer, or more elevated spirit of devotion, than that, which breathes in the Psalms and the prophets? The most just and lofty conceptions of God and his government are drawn forth on all occasions; and the sentiment constantly implied, and not unfrequently expressed in forcible terms, is, that acceptable worship is that of the heart, and not that of the lips; not consisting in words, but in holy affections; not in outward services, but in a deep sense of dependence and of duty.

Besides the direct and positive evidence, we have other of an indirect character, that is not less satisfactory. It is drawn from a consideration of the true end and design of the Jewish Ritual.

We have wrong or inadequate apprehensions of the ceremonial law of the Jews, if we suppose *that* to terminate in itself, to have no further design, no moral purpose to accomplish; if we imagine that the observance of the rite is all that was intended. This was the mistake of the later Jews, and led to that mere ritual obedience, which called for so much severe animadversion from our Saviour. They cleansed the "outside of the cup and of the platter, but regarded not what was within." They were punctual and exact in their ceremonial purifications; but seem to have forgotten, that these were emblematical of a more important purification, — that of the heart, affections, and desires, and that their true design was then only accomplished, when they were accompanied with these moral effects.

That such was the design of the ritual services

prescribed by the law, might have been understood without the commentary, which is given upon them by our Saviour, and by St. Paul. It is constantly referred to in the law itself, and by the prophets, who had occasion to remark and reprove the prevailing corruptions of the age in which they appeared. It may be instanced in several of the most important parts of the ceremonial law.

We know how much of the religious service prescribed by the Law of Moses consisted in the several kinds of sacrifice. The laws for their observance were very strict, and circumstantially minute. And great stress was laid on exactness in those observances. But we shall greatly mistake, if we imagine the whole, or the principal value of them to consist in the sacrifice itself. It was the mind and disposition with which the offering was made, and the exercise of the heart with which it was accompanied, that gave it all its value. Thus, it was not the blood of the lamb or the bullock offered in sacrifice, but the gratitude with which it was offered, that made it an acceptable sacrifice of thanksgiving. It was not the offering itself, whatever it were, nor the exactness of its external conformity to the prescription of the ritual, that expiated guilt and restored the sinner to favor, but the reality of that penitence, of which these external services were intended only to be the sign. The sacrifices acceptable to God are those of the heart. "He that offereth praise glorifieth me." "A humble and contrite spirit he will not despise."

How often again are the Israelites recalled from the



external rite to the moral design of another important requirement of their ritual law,—that of circumcision! They are called to the circumcision of the heart, of which that outward, in the flesh, is only the sign and the token. “The Lord thy God,” says Moses, “will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.” From the repetition of such references, and intimations of a moral meaning and moral design in this rite, almost might the ancient Israelites have come to the conclusion, while the law was in its full force, to which the Apostle was brought, when its binding power had ceased by the introduction of another dispensation; “That is not circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit.” “Circumcision is nothing, nor uncircumcision, but the keeping of the commandments of God.” “Neither circumcision avail-eth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love.”

I have already mentioned the legal purifications. That these also were intended to be symbolical of innocence and moral purity, we might have learned, independently of our Saviour’s comments, from the frequent allusions and general scope of the Old Testament itself. We might have seen that not the cleansing of the body, or that of garments, or vessels, but that holiness of the heart, and an innocent and blameless life, was the main thing intended to be effected.

In the same manner again may we observe in re-

spect to the rest of the Sabbath which the law enjoins. The mere ceasing from bodily labor, according to the letter of the precept, is far from answering its whole design. It was not only to cease from the usual occupations of life. The day was to be sanctified, to be made holy, as well as to be a season of rest. This could only be done by making the day the occasion and the motive for cultivating and improving those affections and virtues, and forming those habits, which together constitute personal holiness. And in the same manner, were the Fasts of the Jewish ritual designed to contribute to a further and more important end, than was seen by him, who considered only the literal abstinence it required. We learn by the reproofs of the prophets in an age of corruption and degeneracy, how far the observance of the letter of the institution might come short of answering its main design ; how far he might be, who most scrupulously abstained from food, and thus mortified the body, from keeping such a fast as would be acceptable to God, by mortifying and subduing the bad passions and affections.

A variety of ceremonial observances belonged to all the great Festivals appointed in the Jewish Law. These observances could none of them be innocently neglected. Not because there was in them, or either of them separately considered, any intrinsic good. But by the recollections they were all together intended and calculated to revive, and the impressions from those stated seasons of religious recollection, the most salutary moral influence was to be produced. He,

then, who should merely observe the external rite without these recollections, these impressions, this practical influence, how far must he fall short of a right observance of the institution.

We mistake then altogether if we imagine the religion of the Old Testament to be a religion of rites and ceremonies, and not of the heart and affections.

II. And as much shall we mistake, if we entertain the thought, that the service of God there enjoined consists wholly in direct acts of worship, and not in universal obedience, and a life of virtue. Direct acts of worship are enjoined, and the manner in which they shall be performed is prescribed. Sacrifices are appointed, to be accompanied with devout affections, and with expressions of humility and penitence, with gratitude and praise, and with humble acknowledgment of dependence, answerable to their respective nature and design. But how widely would he err, who should think, that when he had performed all this according to the letter of the command, he had done all that his Maker required? Let him listen to the appeal of the prophet. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold! to obey is better than sacrifice."\* "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"† The fact is, that not in such appeals of the prophets only, but throughout the

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\* Samuel, xv. 22.

† Micah, vi. 8.

Old Testament, the reverence which God requires is perpetually represented, not as terminating in direct acts of worship, in prayers, sacrifices, and religious services; but as a practical principle, which was to have its influence in the whole conduct of life, to direct its course and form its character, — a principle, which was to operate as constantly and as entirely, as to the whole of a man's behavior in all the domestic and social relations, as in his relation to his Creator and Sovereign and Judge; to lead him to the practice of justice, humanity, kindness, and mercy in his intercourse with his fellow beings, to be sober, temperate, chaste, and faithful in the improvement of his faculties and use of his blessings, as to be humble, devout, and grateful in his acts of homage to God.

It does indeed appear, on a careful view of the general import of the Old Testament, that good affections and right conduct, in the moral sense, constitute the very essence and principal substance of the worship and service that God requires; — that no direct acts of worship, and no ritual observances will be acceptable to God, where the heart is corrupt or the life stained with vice; that “the sacrifice of the wicked is even an abomination to him.”

Nothing indeed can be more unjust than that representation of the Mosaic religion, which makes its ritual services a substitute for practical virtue, or the direct external worship it enjoins intended to supersede in any degree the obligations of moral obedience. The very reverse was the design of the whole ceremonial law, — to promote, not to prevent the practice

of every human virtue. It was adapted to the condition of the people for whom it was designed, and to the age of the world, and the state of improvements in it, when it was promulgated. It was a necessary discipline to prepare men for a purer worship ; and it effected its purpose, not by teaching them that in the interval they were exempted from the obligations of virtue by having a substitute for it ; but by aiding their conceptions by sensible images, by gradually elevating them to higher refinement, and forming their character to a higher moral and intellectual standard, and by making ritual services subservient to a moral end, till they should be prepared by them to pursue the end directly, and lay aside the means by which they were brought to it as no longer necessary.

III. I would observe, in the third place, that under this, not less, than under every other dispensation of God, we see the kindness only and mercy of God. The best interest and highest good of men is the motive and end. All the commands he imposes on men are for their good ;—no unnecessary burdens, no causeless restraints, no unreasonable demands. Burdensome as was the Jewish ritual, compared with the simpler system of Christianity, we have abundant evidence that in its design it was not less kind and merciful, nor less adapted to the good of those to whom it was given. And in discovering this evidence, we are relieved from an important difficulty, in which the subject is involved by the opposite supposition. While the religion of the Old Testament is represented as at variance with that of the New, either as to

the object of worship, the principles and laws of his government, or the service which will be acceptable to him ; it cannot fail to occasion perplexity and doubt to reflecting minds. But if we discover the same Being, the same design, the same disposition, the same will in both, and the difference between them to be only as to the means of accomplishing the same ends, and those means adapted to the period, and the condition and circumstances of things, when they were employed, — the doubts are removed and the perplexity ceases. We see that unity and harmony which mark the character and the works of the Author of nature.

The view, that I have now endeavored to give, therefore, of the nature and spirit of the former dispensation, is not a mere subject of curious speculation. It is an interesting question to us as Christians. It relieves us from the oppressive weight, which hangs on the supposition of two successive dispensations of opposite character and design proceeding from the same Being, and the doubts that hover around us, while we think of such an inconsistency. It restores harmony, and consistency, and unity of spirit, and purpose, and execution to the great scheme of the divine dispensations. It shows us the great Creator the same in the system of revelation, as he appears in the constitution and government of nature ; uniform, consistent, unchangeable ; his disposition toward his creatures the same in every age and in every region ; the notices of his will bearing marks of the same moral design ; indicating no symptoms of change in the objects of

his approbation and complacency, in his demand of duty from beings of the same nature, or in the great purposes or principles of his administration.

These discoveries inspire us with confidence and hope. Our faith in the religion of the Gospel, instead of being weakened by irreconcilable opposition to a preceding revelation, with which it is most closely connected, receives strong confirmation by its entire resemblance in every important feature of their character.

## CHAPTER VIII.

TERMS OF ACCEPTANCE UNDER THE MOSAIC  
DISPENSATION.

I HAVE endeavored to state the doctrine of the Old Testament as to the Object of worship, and the worship which God requires. I am next to show what the same writings teach as to the terms of acceptance with God.

There can be no doubt, that under any dispensation of religion, the terms of acceptance with God will be exactly correspondent to the rule of duty he has prescribed. He will be an acceptable worshipper, whose worship agrees with that rule.

If it has been rightly maintained, that the institutions of Moses have a further and higher design than ritual observance, and external obedience; that the religion of Moses and the prophets is a religion of the heart; and that the service of God, which it enjoins, consists not in outward acts of worship only, but in well regulated affections, and a life of virtue, directed by the purest and best motives, and conducted by principle; — we cannot doubt that a life so conducted will be acceptable to God. We are sure, that well regulated affections, well governed passions, and a correspondent course of life; that innocence, piety, integrity, benevolence, temperance, cannot fail to be



approved by him, who has established those rules of conduct, which are contained in the Old Testament.

We accordingly find this to be often expressed in unequivocal terms. It is expressed in the specific promises annexed to the several duties, as well as those proposed to obedience and righteousness in general; in tokens of the divine approbation, declared to follow a life of holy obedience, or particular acts of virtue; and in declarations of the divine complacency in those that love him and obey his laws.

But it may be asked, whether anything less than innocence, anything short of perfect obedience, can have the hope of the divine favor; whether, under the former dispensation, that of law, any provision is made for defective obedience and imperfect virtue, for the acceptance of sincerity and faithful endeavors, accompanied with defects and requiring allowances.

The Mosaic Law is sometimes represented as rigid and inflexible; requiring universal and unqualified obedience; accepting no substitute; making no allowance for surprise or infirmity, and no provision for pardon. The mercy of God, it is said, is revealed only in the Gospel; the law knows nothing but strict justice.

This mistaken apprehension has arisen, not from a careful attention to the writings of the Old Testament, but from considering only the abstract nature of law, and applying that to the religion of the Old Testament; which we not unfrequently denominate "the Law," as distinguished from "the Gospel." Also, from considering some of the reasonings of St. Paul,

where he is speaking only of the abstract nature of law, as if they were employed in direct and full reference to the whole Mosaic Institution, in contrast with the dispensation of mercy in the Gospel of Christ.

That this is a mistaken view of the subject, I shall now endeavor to show ; and that the spirit of the Old Testament differs not in this respect from that of the New ; or if it differ at all, it is only in respect to the clearness and fulness of the revelation, not in respect to its essential character.

In the first place, this appears from the general representations of the character of God, throughout the writings of the Old Testament. Let me ask what part of it is more frequently alluded to, than that of his free and essential mercy ? Not in the character of stern and inexorable justice, but in that of kindness, compassion, and readiness to extend forgiveness to the penitent, does he delight to appear. Hear what he solemnly declared to Moses, on Sinai, at the renewal of the Tables of the Law. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin."\* Hear also the language of all the succeeding Prophets. "The Lord is merciful. As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."† "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses."‡ "I knew thee that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow

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\* Exodus, xxxiv. † Psalm ciii. ‡ Dan. ix. 7.

to anger, and of great kindness.”\* “He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.”† It appears again in the Paternal character so often expressed in the sacred writings. The very mention of the paternal relation implies all that is kind and gentle. “As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them who fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.”‡ Can anything more strongly and tenderly express a disposition of kindness and compassion, and an affectionate interest in those, who had forfeited their claim to favor by their abuse of kindness, than the following appeal and expostulation? “When Israel was a child I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. I drew them with cords of a man, with bonds of love. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim, how shall I deliver thee, Israel! My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.”§

It appears again in the calls to repentance, and invitations to return to duty and virtue, and expostulations with the obstinate and impenitent; for these can only be urged on the ground, that there is encouragement to repent,—that there is motive and inducement to renounce sin, and return to holiness and obedience. Accordingly all these invitations are accompanied with the most persuasive motives,—with promises and hopes, with assurance of pardon for the past, and the future favor and acceptance of heaven.

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\* Jonah, iv. 2. † Micah, vii. 18. ‡ Psalm ciii. § Hosea, xi. 1–8.

“Yield yourselves therefore unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary, and serve the Lord your God, that his wrath may turn away from you. For the Lord your God is gracious, and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.”\* “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”†

Can anything more be necessary to convince us, that the religion of the Old Testament is a scheme of mercy, providing for repentance, offering forgiveness, revealing purposes of compassion, and the character of a father and friend to his creation, in the Author of nature?

If anything further be requisite to satisfy us on this point, we have it in the expiatory sacrifices, and ritual purifications appointed by the law, and required to be observed by those who lived under that economy. For what is implied in the very nature of such purifications and sacrifices? They have doubtless some meaning. They must imply at least, that the case of the delinquent is not hopeless, — that the justice by which he is condemned is not relentless and inexorable. Pollution may be washed away; guilt may be expiated. He that has contracted defilement may be made clean. The sinner may be restored. Otherwise, why are the sacrifices appointed, the purifications required?

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\* Chronicles, xxx. 8.

† Isaiah, lv. 7.

Is it alleged in opposition to this, that the purifications and the expiations of the law related only to ritual guilt, and ceremonial pollutions? that no sacrifices of the legal dispensation reached to matters of conscience, and could remove moral guilt? This will not affect the case. It will still be true, that so far as they were intended to have any efficacy, they held up encouragement to transgressors of a remission of punishment on certain conditions. It was then an indication of favor, — an expression of the mercy of the Lawgiver. This it was, even though the remission was understood to be limited to legal and ceremonial delinquences, and to have no further reference, and to excite no other hopes.

But that was not all. They were understood not only to express one specific purpose, but the character of the Lawgiver. When such provisions were made for the reconciliation of transgressors of the *ritual* law, it was hardly possible to avoid transferring the same character of mercy to the same Being in the exercise of his *moral* government; and to draw the inference, that similar mercy was provided for those who, having transgressed the moral law, were ready to comply with the prescribed conditions of pardon and reconciliation. This inference, I observe, would have been natural and almost unavoidable, even on the supposition, that those direct declarations on the subject had not been made, which, however, have before been shown to abound in the writings of Moses and the prophets.

It will here be proper to inquire, what was the de-  
VOL. II.

sign and efficacy of sacrifices under the legal dispensation ?

Was it, in the first place, to appease the anger of God, and reconcile him to the offender ?

This seems, most probably, to have been the universal notion of sacrifice among the heathen. Sacrifices, we know, constituted almost the whole of their religion ; and it appears to have been their design to produce an influence upon the minds of their gods, — to appease their wrath, to gratify their love of praise, to induce them to change their purposes, — in fact to flatter or to buy them off by costly oblations, and engage them in their interest. But whatever gross conceptions and false notions on this subject may have prevailed among an ignorant people, no such notion was taught, or could have been designed to be understood, in the appointment of the sacrifices under the Levitical Law. It could not have been the intention to intimate, that those sacrifices were to appease the wrath of God, to render him propitious, to dispose him to mercy and kindness. On the contrary, their very appointment was a proof that he was already disposed to be merciful. It was itself an expression of his mercy. A voluntary offering only, or one prescribed by human authority, could be supposed to operate on the Deity, and produce a change in his disposition or his purposes. The Jewish offerings were prescribed by God himself. They must therefore teach us what his disposition, his will, and his purposes already are ; and not be employed to change them, and render them more kind and propitious. They

are appointed beforehand to operate as motives, not upon God, but upon men, — not to make God propitious or reconcile him to the offender, but upon the offender himself, to encourage and excite him to repentance and virtue, by the hope of forgiveness and assurances of mercy. Thus, to mention a single instance, it cannot enter into our imagination, that the several offerings on the great day of atonement, together with the scape-goat let loose into the wilderness with peculiar ceremonies, were intended to reconcile God to the people, and change his disposition and his purposes toward them. The whole transactions give a contrary impression. They prove that God was inclined beforehand to show mercy, and appointed these rites as suitable symbolical expressions of that penitence, renunciation of sin, and holy resolution, which would render the offender a fit subject for pardon and object of the divine favor. They were accordingly designed to operate, as motives, on the offender, by showing him that his condition, as a sinner, was not hopeless, and thus encouraging him to perform those conditions, both as to the external act and the internal disposition, upon which forgiveness was offered.

I dwell on this point, and urge it the more, because I believe it of great importance, and that there is a prevalent misapprehension in this respect of the true nature and design of the Jewish sacrifices. That they were intended to pacify God, goes on the idea, that he is severe and stern and requires to be softened and rendered propitious; whereas he is universally

represented as merciful in his nature, and all these appointments are the provisions of his mercy.

Another question relative to the design and efficacy of the legal sacrifices is, whether they were to expiate guilt, by making satisfaction to offended justice.

Against the notion of any such satisfaction being intended, is what has already been conceded as to the kind of offences for which they were designed to make atonement; not violations of morality, but of the ceremonial law. But a more important consideration is, that if it be maintained, that the sacrifices of the law were intended to expiate the guilt of the transgressor by satisfying the justice of God, it will seem to render repentance, reformation, and restitution, or repairing, as far as can be done, the wrong that has been committed, unnecessary. For where, it may be asked, where the propriety, or the consistency of requiring an injury to be repaired, after satisfaction has been made? And if sacrifices, as a substitute for neglected duty, or a compensation for violations of the law were to be accepted, as making satisfaction to justice, as equivalents for obedience, where were the motives for reformation, and the security of virtue?

But the most decisive consideration, that no such satisfaction is implied, is found in the constant tenor, and uniform spirit and language, of the Old Testament itself. Repentance for past sins, reformation of life, and reparation of injuries, are everywhere demanded as the necessary conditions of the divine favor. No substitute for them is ever suggested. Whenever



sacrifices or any ritual services are mentioned in connexion with them, it is to depreciate their value, to show that they are of no avail without these. Unaccompanied with these, with what abhorrence are they spoken of! "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of your burnt offerings. Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination to me. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble to me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood."\* Here then is the decisive circumstance, which renders every endeavor to obtain the favor of God without avail. While your hands are full of blood, while you remain impenitent and unreformed, no sacrifices can make atonement, and no exactness of ritual obedience will be accepted as a substitute.

What then is a guilty people, or an individual sinner, to do, that he may hope for the mercy of God, and recover the forfeited favor of offended heaven? Hear the prophet himself proceed. Or rather hear the voice of God by the mouth of the prophet. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.

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\* Isaiah, i. 11 - 15.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."

Can we require anything more to convince us, that no sacrifices of the law were intended to expiate guilt, or compensate for the want of moral obedience, or stand as a substitute for repentance and a life of virtue, or satisfy offended justice ?

And can we need anything more to teach us, what is their design and real efficacy ? We see that unaccompanied with repentance and a return to virtue they are without avail and are unacceptable. Then only are they an acceptable offering, when accompanied with humble penitence and holy resolutions, and followed by purity of heart and life. Here then do we discover their design and efficacy. They are expressions of the disposition of the offerer, of his penitence and submission to the law, of his wish to take refuge in the divine mercy, and his purpose to yield a cheerful obedience to the divine commands. And so far only are they efficacious, as they are actually accompanied with these dispositions and practical effects.

We attribute, then, no efficacy to sacrifices, or any of the ritual observances appointed by the law, which serves to impair or to alter the terms of the divine favor and acceptance. Innocence, purity, righteousness, and truth are ever the delight, and will ensure the approbation of our Creator. Right affections and correspondent practice, piety and gratitude to the

Author of all blessings, and a right use of them ; temperance and self-government ; kindness, humanity, justice, and all the social virtues ; these are the sacrifices that will be acceptable to God.

But men are imperfect, and their virtue at best but imperfect, and their obedience defective. They are sinners, who stand in need of mercy to pardon. Mercy, we accordingly find to be provided. Terms of acceptance are proposed, grounded on the character and condition of man as a sinner, needing forgiveness, and liable always to error, and folly, and sin. Terms which cancel not the obligations of holiness, yet encourage repentance and reformation, by the assurance of forgiveness, and excite to virtuous resolutions and endeavors by the revelation of that mercy, which will not reject sincere and faithful endeavors, though encompassed with infirmities and defects.

The law, we then conclude, was not a system of stern and rigorous justice, but, like the Gospel, and introductory to it, a scheme of mercy ; adapted to the condition of the age for which it was intended ; appointed, by the same merciful being, in the same merciful spirit, for carrying on and accomplishing the same kind and benevolent purposes ; differing not in its demands or its conditions, in the revelation it makes of the will of God, or the terms of his approbation and favor.

## CHAPTER IX.

## OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

I HAVE endeavored to show, that the religion of the Old Testament is a dispensation of mercy ; that, while it requires the affections of the heart, as well as a life of virtue and holy obedience, it provides for the acceptance of repentance and reformation.

To these views of the subject there is an objection, which has already been alluded to, together with the solution of which it is capable. But it may be proper to give it a more distinct consideration.

The objection resolves itself into two parts. The first, relating to those texts in the New Testament, in which a comparison is made between the Law and the Gospel, and they are contrasted with each other, the one as a scheme of mercy, the other, of condemnation ; the one proposing life, the other denouncing death ; — the second, relating to the curses, which are in the law itself pronounced, without exception, and apparently without remedy, against all disobedience, and every violation of the law.

In respect to the former of these, it might be sufficient to remark, that allowance is to be made for a manner of speaking very common to the Hebrew language, — not peculiar to it indeed, but familiar also in our own tongue ; — by which is used a greater

strength of expression than is meant to be literally understood ; and this is usually done in the way of comparison and contrast. Thus, in the conversation of our Saviour with the woman of Samaria, he said, "The hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."\* It would seem to be implied, that till then, the true worshippers of God had worshipped otherwise ; but can we for a moment imagine, that this was the meaning intended ? So, when it is said, "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," the meaning was not what the words literally interpreted would signify, namely, that there was no grace nor truth in the Law of Moses ; but that the dispensation of the Gospel is a system of more important truth, and a more gracious or benevolent dispensation. It will not imply, that under the legal dispensation no mercy was provided, but that under the Christian the mercy of God is more clearly revealed. This solution will apply to all those texts, in which the Gospel is compared with the law for the purpose of proving its superior excellence. To infer from such passages, that the Mosaic dispensation contained no provision of mercy,—contrary to the whole spirit of the Old Testament, which we have seen, declares the mercy of God,—would be as unreasonable and unwarrantable, as it would be, to draw the opposite inference from the declaration by the prophet, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," namely, that

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\* John, iv. 23.

sacrifice was not required of the people of Israel, when it was simply intended to express the preference of moral virtue to ritual observance ; or from such re-proofs, as those in the fiftieth Psalm and the first chapter of Isaiah, that God did not require sacrifices of the children of Israel, nor the observance of the new moons, sabbaths, and festivals of his own appointment.

This solution appears to be satisfactory, to leave no real difficulty, and to require nothing more than the application of those principles to the interpretation of Scripture, which common sense dictates.

Nor do I perceive any greater difficulty in those few texts, which pronounce the curse of the law without exception, and apparently without remedy, against all disobedience and every violation of the law. As for instance, "Cursed is every one, that continueth not in all things, which are written in the Book of the Law to do them."\* Not to repeat again, what has before been said, as to the design of the Apostle in the passage in which it stands, it may be doubted, whether the most strict and literal meaning will necessarily preclude the notion of mercy and forgiveness. Wherever there is law there must be a penalty, which is incurred of course by him, who violates the law. Whoever in any point has violated the law is exposed to the penalty ; he is under its condemnation. He is equally so, whether the law has provided for remission on any prescribed condition, or not. Until the condition is complied with, the con-

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\* Gal. iii. 10. Quoted by Paul from Deut. xxvii. 26.

demning sentence, or curse, is in its full force ; although the conditions may be such, that the penalty shall never in fact be exacted. Nor is there, as it will appear, any such difference, in this respect, between the condition of men under the Law and under the Gospel, as to the terms of final acceptance with God, that the one should be denominated a scheme of mercy and life, the other of condemnation and death.

For how is the case under the Gospel ? Is there no condition, on which its mercy is offered ? Are no terms prescribed, to be complied with in order to receive its benefits ? Is there no penalty annexed to a nonacceptance of the conditions, a noncompliance with the terms ? Now, if faith, repentance, and a holy life be required in order to our partaking that final mercy of God, which the Gospel reveals, and if he who is without these, though living under the Gospel, is in a state of condemnation ; in what does his case differ, except as to the kind of condition, better means, and clearer light, from his who lived under the former dispensation ? Like him, he is under a government requiring obedience, prescribing duty ; appointing rules of life to be observed. Like him, he lives under a dispensation, that reveals the mercy of God, promises forgiveness to the penitent, and assures the favor of heaven to those, who could not claim it on the ground of perfect obedience ; but like him too, all the promises, all the hopes he enjoys are conditional. All the mercy provided for him may be forfeited, may be lost. Impenitence will as certainly be ruin to the one as to

the other, and true repentance and a return to holiness as certainly accepted in the one as in the other. And in the same volume, which reveals all the Christian's hopes, and makes known to him his privileges and distinctions over the disciple of Moses, he yet reads, "If the word spoken by angels,"—messengers of God, as Moses and the prophets,—“was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him?”\* Again, “If he that despised Moses' Law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God!”† Once more. “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him, who speaketh from heaven.”‡

With these passages before us, can a doubt remain, whether the offers of mercy under the Gospel are any freer from conditions, or furnish an easier security of the divine favor, than those of the preceding dispensation? Can a doubt remain, whether the Christian now be less bound to a life of obedience, than he, who lived under the Jewish law? or be subjected to a penalty less severe, if he fail to fulfil the conditions of the law, under which he lives?

Another objection to the representation before given

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\* Heb. ii. 2.

† Heb. x. 28.

‡ Heb. xii. 25.



of the principles of the former institution, as revealing the equal mercy of God, and providing for a righteous retribution, is drawn from the sanction annexed to the second command, which represents God as "visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children," and a few examples of severe retribution thus administered.

I shall endeavor to show, that this representation and the corresponding examples have nothing to do with the terms of acceptance with God, and have no relation to his retributive justice, which is not at all affected by them. With respect to the text in the Decalogue,—"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;"—it is to be recollected, that this is declared respecting the crime of idolatry only. The Israelites were under the government of God in a peculiar sense. While they were obedient and observed his worship and his laws, they were to enjoy peculiar privileges and blessings, safety, peace, prosperity; but whenever they should forsake the true God, for an idolatrous worship, these advantages must cease. They were forfeited. They were indeed voluntarily relinquished, because the express condition upon which they were held was violated. But what were the advantages thus forfeited, and the evils thus incurred? They were public and national, not personal and individual; they related, too, wholly to temporal interests, and not at all to the retributions of a future life. While the people of Israel maintained their alliance to the true God and adhered to the institutions of Moses, they were to remain in the promised

land, and to enjoy prosperity. This prosperity, and their title to the favored country ceased with their fidelity, and were to be lost by apostasy. Nor did they lose their distinction and privileges for themselves only. The penalty must of necessity fall on their children. And when we consider the nature of the crime,—that of renouncing the true religion, and going over to the idolatrous worship of their heathen neighbors,—the probability is exceedingly great, that the defection, and together with it, the punishment would descend to three or four generations, before the evil would be effectually cured. We accordingly find the great national calamity of the Babylonish captivity lasted for seventy years, a period in which there would naturally occur many instances of three and even four successive generations of sufferers in the same family. Here then was an example of the visitation of the father's iniquities upon the third and fourth generation of his descendants. But it will be observed it was the infliction of only temporal punishment; and the threatening of it was designed to operate as a powerful motive to deter the parent from a course, which would bring evils of so long continuance on his posterity.

Besides, as I before observed, the benefits of obedience and the punishment of disobedience of this law were national chiefly, and not personal. Idolatry was a national sin; and national punishment could only relate to the present life. The political person, the subject of it, has no other existence. The punishment therefore, denounced in this law of Moses, is no

other than that, which the constitution of nature has appointed, and which must take place under the Christian and any other dispensation, as well as the Mosaic, unless the constitution of nature were changed. It takes place according to the universal principle, by which individuals are affected by general laws; are involved, as members of the body politic, in the natural consequences of crimes in which they had no personal share; and partake, in the natural course of things, in some of the consequences of the conduct of their parents and even of their remoter ancestors.

Were the penalty in question annexed to other sins as well as to idolatry, it would not differ from what we see and constantly experience under the providence of God, under the Christian dispensation. Not the vices only, but the follies and neglects of one generation are visited in calamities and deprivations on the next and the succeeding.

Let one generation of men in a country neglect to maintain their freedom and rights; the fatal consequences will not be confined to them, they will fall upon their children, and their loss will not be repaired perhaps for several generations. Let the present race neglect the education of their children; by this failure of duty the children become sufferers, and it may be several generations before their descendants shall rise to the intellectual and moral state, to which they would otherwise have attained. Let an individual by carelessness or mismanagement waste his estate; how long will his children have to feel its effects in poverty and want? Still greater evils and worse

effects, and of as long continuance, may follow intemperance and profligacy. Hereditary disease, an enfeebled constitution, passions enflamed, and the moral taste corrupted and perverted, these, as well as diminished worldly prosperity, may be some of the miserable consequences they will have to sustain.

But all this taking place in the ordinary course of things prevents not, that the constitution of nature, and the Christian dispensation under which it takes place, should perfectly consist with personal responsibility, and a righteous retribution. It does not prevent that men shall, in their final account, be dealt with in a strict and exact regard to their own character, without any reference to the deeds of their ancestors ; and with sole reference to their conduct in the circumstances in which they are placed, by whatever law those circumstances were appointed. It may still be true, under each dispensation alike, that "God will finally render to every man according to his deeds ; that every man shall bear his own burden ; his own, and not another's." In the words of the prophet, so distinct, so emphatic, so repeated,—“ The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” There shall be no foundation for the proverbial expression, so true and so monitory and instructive, as respects temporal inflictions, and circumstances of suffering and disadvantage,—“ The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth

are set on edge." And as little occasion shall there be for the mournful and pathetic exclamation of the prophet amidst the ruins and desolation of his country,—“Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have borne their iniquities.”

The visitation here referred to is one of the examples, which I was next to consider, of the actual subjection of children to suffering and calamity for the sins of their fathers. To this instance are applicable all the observations that have already been made. It was a national calamity, brought on by a long series of national declension. Under the reign of a succession of corrupt princes, with few and infrequent exceptions of pious monarchs, such as Hezekiah and Josiah, the nation had apostatized from God, sunk into gross idolatry, and regardless of the remonstrances and warnings of their prophets, had departed wholly from the institutions of Moses and the worship of God. For their punishment and correction, the temple they had polluted was destroyed, the institutions they had neglected or perverted were taken away, and the inhabitants of the land were carried into captivity. In a foreign land, their sufferings brought them to a sense of the folly and ingratitude, that had brought such calamities upon them. They learned the value of the privileges and distinctions they had lost, and it made no small part of the affliction of their state, and of their motive to return to their allegiance, that their children, who had no share in their guilt, were to inherit all its most dreadful consequences. It must have filled them with anguish to

foresee, as they could hardly fail to do, that the posterity they should leave behind them in hopeless captivity would have cause to pour forth, as they afterward actually did, the bitter and desponding complaint, "Our fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have borne their iniquities."

I observe, then, that the fathers were punished in the sufferings of the children, brought upon them by their transgressions. The sufferings of the children were temporal. They were also disciplinary and corrective; and as soon as they had answered their design in their repentance and reformation, were removed. They were restored to the land of their fathers, to their possessions, and to their religious privileges. There was, therefore, even with respect to present retributions some regard, as far indeed as a general providence would admit, to personal character; and there was nothing incompatible with each one being judged eventually, without any reference to the desert of his ancestors, according to the manner he had conducted under the discipline which providence had appointed for him, and receiving according to his personal character.

Similar observations may be made with respect to other instances of like retribution. Thus when the prophet pronounced on his faithless servant Gehazi the sentence, "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and to thy seed forever,"—to the guilty father the severity of the punishment was highly enhanced by the knowledge, that it was to be transmitted down in his family; to the children themselves it

only constituted one part of their trial ; and whether it should prove an evil or a blessing to them depended on the influence it should have in forming their character.

On the curse pronounced by Noah upon the posterity of Ham, it may, besides, be remarked, that the denunciation was wholly prophetic, and so far as the punishment of a want of filial piety was intended, fell exclusively upon Ham himself. Though he does not even appear to have been personally the subject of the curse at all, but his remote posterity, it must have been sufficiently afflictive to him to be informed, that a race of men descending from him, were at a remote period, to become so degenerate, and be reduced to a condition so degraded and servile. Whether their degeneracy and degradation had any natural connexion or not with his deed, any resemblance there might be between the one and the other could not fail to heighten his sense of shame and remorse.

Let it be further recollected, in support of the idea, that this memorable curse was wholly prophetic, that the venerable patriarch in pronouncing it, mentions one branch only of the descendants of his unworthy son ;—"Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren." But why Canaan, and he only of the sons of Ham ? Why the other three sons, Cush, Mizraim, and Phut, exempted from the penalty, if it were a punishment inflicted on the children for the crime of the father ? But if, as has been suggested, the design of this curse was, to punish the father in a foresight of the future destiny of his de-

scendants,—which destiny they would deserve by their degeneracy and corruptions, and of which corruptions and degeneracy he was, perhaps, now planting the seeds, and certainly was exhibiting a shameful and corrupting example,—while the other branches of his race should resist the contagion, be unpolluted by the example, and escape the corruption,—then the distinction was natural, and the confinement of the curse to Canaan accounted for. He only would be mentioned, to whom both the character and the punishment belonged.

There is another consideration on this subject worthy of attention. It is, that blessings, as well as punishments, are represented as hereditary. What important blessings and invaluable distinctions belonged to the descendants of Abraham as the reward of that faith, which distinguished him in an age of general apostasy, by his fidelity to the true God and his worship! It was the reward of David's pious zeal and faithful care of the worship of God, to have the promise of an unfailing succession of his descendants to sit on the throne of their fathers. And Jehu, for his zealous service in executing the purposes of heaven on the house of Ahab and the worshippers of Baal, had the promise that his sons, to the fourth generation, should continue to sit on the throne of Israel. Nothing indeed is more frequent in the writings of Moses, in the Psalms, and the Prophets, than encouragement to piety and obedience, by the promise to parents of blessings to their children. This is placed, and with great effect, among the motives to obedience and a holy life.



And this, as well as the other part of the scheme under the dispensation of Moses, is in no degree peculiar, nor furnishes any just ground of objection, or peculiar reason for commendation. It differs in nothing from what we see continually taking place in the common course of events. It belongs as much to the Christian as the Mosaic dispensation, and as much to the religion of nature as to either.

But under these we have no apprehension, for we are clearly taught the contrary, of its impairing at all each man's personal responsibility for his actions of his being, or affecting the conditions of his acceptance in the final account.

We see indeed the whole of each man's worldly condition and temporal prospects, together with his intellectual, moral, and religious opportunities affected, and taking almost their entire shape, from the character and the care or neglect of his ancestors. We see his condition attended with favorable circumstances or otherwise, his opportunities great or small, and the trials of his virtue light or severe, according to provisions made by those who preceded him, and in which he had no choice. But we know that for these things, over which he had no control, he is not accountable. He may be said in a certain sense to be visited with the iniquities of his fathers, or to have by inheritance the reward of their virtues. But so far are these, in our apprehension, from being evidences of the acceptance or rejection of God, the approbation or the displeasure of heaven, that we view them merely as parts of that divine discipline and human

trial, which are to be the means of our probation ; to furnish scope for that virtuous obedience and wise self-government, or criminal unfaithfulness and folly of self-indulgence, which will be the grounds of final acceptance or rejection. For we are assured, that not he who enjoys the greatest advantages of virtue, but he who makes the best use of them, not he who has the most talents, but he who employs them to the best purpose, not he who enjoys the highest privileges, but he who is most faithful in their use,—is accepted and approved.

## CHAPTER X.

## A PROPHET LIKE MOSES PROMISED.

IN passing now from the Jewish to the Christian Dispensation, we naturally recur to the connexion between them, which we have had occasion to notice. As in various ways the former anticipated and referred to the latter, so did it especially in its early promise of another Prophet; "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken."\*

There are several allusions to this promise in the writings of the Evangelists, in which it is expressed, or clearly implied, to be the general opinion of the Jews of that time, that this promise had not then been fulfilled, and that it related to the coming of a great prophet, who was yet to appear, and was expected under the title of the Messiah. With respect to this last point, however, the identity of that prophet and the Messiah, there seems to have been some uncertainty in the minds of the Jews of that age. Thus when John the Baptist in the beginning of his ministry produced a great excitement by his preaching, the Scribes and Pharisees sent from Jerusalem to inquire of him, whether he were the Christ, whether he were

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\* Deuteronomy, xviii. 15.

Elias, whether he were the Prophet ; that is, the prophet that was promised, the prophet that was expected.\*

When Jesus fed by a miracle, the great multitude, that followed him to an uninhabited place, the people said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world ;"† led probably to the conclusion by the resemblance of this act with that of the great Jewish Lawgiver, who fed the people of Israel with manna in the wilderness ; and being reminded by it of the promise, which it is very evident they did not consider as having been yet fulfilled ; and the fulfilment of which, it also appears, they were anxiously expecting.

Again, when at the Feast of Tabernacles, at Jerusalem, Jesus made a striking allusion to some of the ancient prophecies in application to himself, "many of the people said, of a truth this is the Prophet ; others said, this is the Christ." In this, as in the other cases, we can have no doubt, they had in their minds, the prophet by way of eminence, promised, and so long expected ; who was to resemble in those points, by which he was distinguished from all the other prophets, Moses, their great Lawgiver.

The same thing appears in the report of Philip to Nathaniel, when he first called his attention to Jesus in Galilee. "We have found," said he, "him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write."‡ A manner of expression, which shows, that at that time

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\* John, i. 21.

† John, vi. 14.

‡ John, i. 45.

it was generally understood, that he of whom Moses spoke had not yet appeared, and also, that there was an expectation of his appearance, by which the attention of men was readily drawn to one, in whom some of the marks were seen by which his appearance was to be distinguished.

Peter and Stephen, also, in their addresses to the people, quote this promise of their great Lawgiver, not only in such a manner as to imply the general consent, that it did not relate to his immediate successor; but also so as to express the opinion, universally prevalent then, that the prophecy related to their expected Messiah, and that it had found its accomplishment in Jesus Christ.

With these facts before us to show, what was the popular interpretation of this celebrated promise of the great Jewish Lawgiver and Prophet through the whole period of the history of the nation, let us now consider the application of it to Jesus Christ, and with what propriety it has been considered as being accomplished in him.

The first point of resemblance to Moses, by which the future prophet was to be distinguished, related to the degree of intimacy with the will and purposes of God. This is strongly expressed by the phrase, — “whom the Lord knew face to face.” This intimacy with the counsels of heaven, and directness of communicating with God implied in it, was peculiar to Moses. It was granted to no other prophet of that, or of any succeeding age. The authority and influence, which it gave to Moses, excited the envy of his

contemporaries. They were discontented under the superiority which it gave him. A sedition was accordingly excited, — “Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses,” say they; “hath he not also spoken by us?” This complaint drew forth an explanation of the points, wherein consisted the difference between the authority and powers with which the divine mission of Moses, and that of other prophets was vested. There was a difference as to the fulness and completeness of the divine communications, and also as to the manner in which they were given.

“If,” said the divine oracle, uttered from the pillar of the cloud at the door of the Tabernacle, where the people were assembled to hear the decision of the controversy, — “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. But my servant Moses is not so. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, and not in dark speeches.” This distinction is clear and important; the communications to the one were to be occasional, partial, with a degree of obscurity; to the other, clear, direct, complete, and constant. All this is indicated by the strong expressions, “that God knew him face to face, that he spoke to him mouth to mouth,” and that he delivered his messages to him, not in dreams and visions, and by him to mankind, not in dark speeches.

But the resemblance between Moses and Jesus Christ in this respect is as striking, as the contrast between him and all the other prophets. To express

the same kind of direct intercourse with God, and intimate acquaintance with the counsels of heaven, which in Moses is called "seeing face to face, and speaking mouth to mouth;" it is said of Christ, "that he was in the bosom of the Father; that in him dwelt the fulness of the Deity; that he was in the Father and the Father in him; that he and the Father were one." With an entire difference of phraseology and different figures of speech, here is a very striking similarity in the import of the language applied to the founder of the Jewish and that of the Christian economy. And in accordance with this is also the language by which our Saviour himself expresses his manner of receiving and communicating the messages of heaven. "I have given unto them," said he, "the words which thou gavest me." "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting; whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." This is a manner of expressing his familiar, and full, and direct acquaintance with the will and purposes of God, which could not have been used by any of his apostles, and such as none of them ever presumed to use. It is such as was not employed by any of the prophets, except Moses; but differs not in meaning from what is said of his "seeing face to face, and speaking mouth to mouth."

Another point of resemblance between Moses and Jesus consists in the exhibition of a supernatural

power accompanying and giving proof of the divine mission of each. "There arose not another prophet, (till the coming of Christ,) like Moses, in all the signs and wonders, which God sent him to do, in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, to all his servants and to all his land; in all that mighty hand, and in all that great terror, which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel."

The resemblance in this case is as striking as in the other. The power of miracles was not confined to Moses. It was occasionally exercised by succeeding prophets. But the instances were rare. In Jesus Christ, as in Moses, this power appears to have resided in a different manner; to have been permanent, not occasional only; and to have been exerted with a frequency, and on a scale of magnificence and splendor, which admit of no comparison with the works of any other. And this resemblance which was to mark the prophet, who was promised to stand in the place of Moses, and which so fully appeared in Jesus Christ, was well suited, like the other, to the peculiar character in which they both appeared, and which makes the great and leading circumstance in which the future prophet was to be like Moses.

He was to resemble him, and Jesus Christ did resemble him, in being a Lawgiver, in being the founder of a new dispensation; in introducing a new economy. Each of the other distinctions derive all their value, and receive all their importance from this, and were valuable only, as they served to qualify them for this. But as qualifications for this they were essential.



To the founder of a new dispensation, both the intimate knowledge of the divine counsels attributed to Moses and Jesus, and the miraculous powers they exerted in proof of their divine mission, were indispensable. Such a dispensation could have been introduced and supported in no other way. A revelation of the will and purposes of God, beyond what is given in the regular exercise of the natural faculties employed upon the exhibitions in the natural world, implies a supernatural intercourse with the Deity, by which these communications are made; and the divine authority of these communications can only be established by the exercise of a supernatural power; or, as is very correctly expressed in relation to Jesus Christ, by "doing that, which no man could do, except God were with him."

But a revelation once introduced with satisfactory proof, neither the same power, nor the same supernatural illumination is necessary in the succeeding preachers. Accordingly both the Jewish and the Christian economy were accompanied in their introduction by the exhibition of powers, which were not required to be continued afterward; and what was thus established by supernatural means at first, was left to be carried on afterward and continued, by ordinary means and by common instruments and agents.

There is one other circumstance, (and this is also a circumstance of resemblance to what took place in respect to the divine mission of Moses,) which was to distinguish the coming and the ministry of the

future prophet. "Unto him shall ye hearken ; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken to my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." The ministry of this prophet could not be disregarded by those, to whom he was sent, with impunity. Like the mission and ministry of Moses, that of Jesus Christ was accompanied with a penalty upon those who would not receive it, or who should receive it in vain. As expressed by Paul, the Gospel was a "savor of life, or a savor of death." The Gospel was to be a dispensation of mercy. But the greater was the mercy offered, the greater was the guilt of rejecting the offer. The rejection of it, therefore, like that of the Law, exposed to punishment. "He that despised Moses' Law died without mercy under two or three witnesses ; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the spirit of grace ?" \* "If the word spoken by Angels,"—that is, by those messengers of God who introduced and carried on to its completion the former dispensation, Moses and the prophets,— "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ; which first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by

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\* Hebrews, x. 28, 29.

them that heard him, God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the holy spirit.”\*

What was meant by the denunciation, “Whosoever will not hearken to my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him,” may be learned from the interpretation given to it by Peter, in his application of the prophecy to Jesus Christ. “It shall come to pass, that every soul that will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”†

With what terrible effect this denunciation was executed upon the Jewish nation, who did reject this last messenger, we learn from the judgments which were brought upon them soon after Jesus and his apostles had executed their ministry among them ; in the destruction of their city and temple, the captivity and dispersion of their nation, and the long and hopeless continuance of the entire loss of their civil and religious privileges, and the use of their most valued institutions.

Such was the fulfilment of the promise, such has been the execution of the threatening. But let us not forget, that the threatening relates, not only to those to whom the Gospel was first offered with the evidence of miracles, and formally rejected. It relates to all in every age, — not only to those, who, like the Jews in our Saviour’s time, formally refused to receive him as their prophet and teacher,—but also to all such,

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\* Hebrews, ii. 2, 3, 4.

† Acts, iii. 22.

as acknowledging his claims, yet fail to hearken to the words which he speaks, in the name of him who sent him ; who admit his mission as a divine teacher, yet are regardless of the instructions he has given ; who acknowledge his authority as a lawgiver, yet yield not a cheerful obedience to the laws he has appointed.

“ See, then, that ye refuse not him that speaketh ; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him, that speaketh from heaven.”

## CHAPTER XI.

## MIRACLES.

WE come now to the question, whether the account of supernatural events being found, in the Old and New Testaments, interwoven with the history of common events, serves to destroy its credibility, or in any considerable degree to impair it. If it be thought to do it, it must be for one of the following reasons; either because a miracle is in itself incredible, that is, incapable of being entitled to our faith by any degree of evidence whatever; and accordingly to be rejected without inquiring; or that those ascribed to Moses and our Saviour were in themselves, or in their proof, liable to some peculiar objection.

By a miracle we mean “a sensible deviation from the known laws of nature; or, an effect contrary to the established constitution and course of things.” Anything short of this, — though it may be above our comprehension, so as to excite wonder, and so as to render it difficult for us to distinguish it from a miracle, — yet is not one in reality. There is thus undoubtedly, arising from our imperfect knowledge of the powers of nature, a difficulty in many cases of distinguishing with certainty what is, and what is not, supernatural. But this is far from applying to all cases, and there are many in which there can be no difficulty, and no

danger of mistake. Some of the miracles of Moses, for example, could be successfully imitated by the magicians of Egypt. By slight of hand, they could appear to change a rod into a serpent, to produce frogs, and to change water into blood, so as to impose on the spectators. But when Moses changed the whole water of Egypt into blood, when he turned, not a handful of dust only, but all the dust of their land into loathsome insects; and when he covered the whole country with darkness for three days, there could be no deception; the Magicians themselves were compelled to confess, that here was "the finger of God." There could be no question, whether, in producing these effects on so large a scale, as to preclude the possibility of deception, a power over the constitution and laws of nature were exercised, such as could only belong to the Author of nature.

Again, we know that blindness, lameness, and almost every disease to which the human frame is subject, are cured by the application of adequate means, and that life itself has sometimes been restored, when its functions have been for a time suspended. These effects are known to be produced by natural causes. We see the blind restored to sight by the removal of the cause of blindness, and persons apparently dead recovered to life by a treatment, which experience has proved to be sometimes effectual, without attributing the effect in either case to violation or suspension of the laws of nature. But were we to see a blind man restored instantly to sight at the word of another, or one who had been four days dead come

forth from the grave alive at his call, we should have no hesitation in pronouncing, that *here* was an unquestionable exercise of supernatural power.

In all cases, in which the course of nature is *understood*, it is easy to be seen, whether an event be a deviation from it, and therefore a miracle, or not ; and, on the other hand, where the course of nature is not known, it must be admitted, that were a true miracle to be performed, it could not be known as such ; because it could not be distinguished from an effect taking place by ordinary means.

That a miracle is not in itself incredible, on account of any intrinsic absurdity or impossibility in its very nature, can hardly be made a question by any, who acknowledge the being and government of God. He who believes, that the course of nature, and the laws by which all effects take place in the visible universe, were established by the Author of nature, — however fixed and invariable they may have been in their operation, and even though there had never happened a single deviation from them from the first, — cannot doubt the power of Him, who first established, to alter, suspend, or depart occasionally or altogether from those laws ; if ever he should see sufficient reason for doing it. It cannot be thought to require a greater exertion of power, or a more wonderful display of it, to interrupt the order of nature, than at first to have produced, or constantly to have maintained it. It will surely not be pretended to be in itself a more astonishing exhibition of the divine power to restore life to a dead body, than it was to give life to that body at first.

If, then, there be any such antecedent presumption against miracles, as to render the account of them incredible, it must arise, not from any intrinsic difficulty in them, but from their being unnecessary, or unworthy of the Deity to perform or to authorize.

But why should it be thought, that the constitution of nature and the laws of the universe must be so fixed and invariable, that no occasion could occur to render it fit and expedient for its Author so to interpose, as to make his hand visible, and so that his direct agency could not be mistaken?

That constitution of things is wise and good, and entitled to our high admiration, in which is to be seen a regular plan, all the parts of which are intimately related together; in which general laws are established; where events follow each other usually in a uniform manner, so that effects may be foreseen with a great degree of certainty in their causes. Such a system is that of the universe.

But the very regularity of such a system has a tendency, by its constancy and uniformity, to be the occasion, that the power and wisdom by which it is brought about are overlooked. The Author of nature and his agency are thus hidden from our view, and the very hand, by which all this order is produced, is unseen. The operations of nature in the visible universe going on without interruption in one uniform manner, by invariable laws, as they limit our view, so they set bounds to our inquiry; and the invisible Being, by whose constant agency the whole is continually going on, is entirely overlooked. That what



is visible under the name of Nature usurps the place of the Lord of nature, is a subject of our constant experience. So completely is the agency of the Author of nature concealed from our view in its regularity and constancy, that we become sensible of it only when it is interrupted. What then would be more worthy of the wisdom of God, or better suit his kind purposes, than such occasional sensible interpositions, as shall show that the order and harmony which we see, as well as its occasional interruption, is his work? Besides, there was a time, when the direct agency, which now makes a miracle, was not only possible, but necessary. The course of nature itself must have had a beginning. The human race must have had a beginning. And then, in each case, a power must have been exerted, such as that which we now call miraculous. Nor can we well suppose this direct agency to have immediately ceased, when the work of creation was finished, and the course of nature established. Suppose the first of our race to have been created with all the organs of the body and faculties of the mind in their full maturity, yet destitute of those instincts, which direct inferior beings with unfailing accuracy to the objects suitable to supply their necessities,—what was there to prevent their perishing before reason and experience could have taught them how their being was to be preserved? The present existence of the human race is then a proof, that in the infancy of the world, a power, not limited in its exercise by the present known laws of the universe, must have been exerted.

But if it was worthy of the Deity to create such a race of beings at first, and to provide for their preservation, continuance, and well-being, by special acts, as well as by general provision ; why should it be thought incredible, that the same disposition and the same design should lead to similar special provisions for their recovery, if at any time required by the exigencies of their condition ?

Now, whether it were through the original deficiency of the light of nature, the abuse of it, or inattention to it, it is an undeniable fact, that the world was early sunk into a state of deplorable ignorance, idolatry, irreligion, and sin ; which, instead of disappearing, were found to increase, as the world grew older, and to threaten the total loss of all vestiges of pure religion, and of the true worship of God. Was it then unworthy of the wisdom and the benevolence of the Father of the race thus fallen, in the failure of ordinary means, to interpose by some of an extraordinary kind for their recovery and restoration ?

There is another point of view, in which there will appear, not only no presumption against, but a strong one in favor of some special provisions for the benefit of mankind, beyond what are found in the ordinary and established laws of the universe. I refer to the nature of man compared with that of all the other inhabitants of this world ; so far superior, that there can surely be neither absurdity nor arrogance in the supposition of his being appointed by the Author of his being to a proportionably higher destiny. Capable, by the improvable nature of his faculties, of inde-

finite degrees of intellectual and moral progress toward perfection ; it were but a reasonable expectation, that he was intended to survive this mortal life, so obviously disproportioned to his faculties, nor allowing, in most instances, an opportunity for their full development, as it does to all other creatures. The immortality of the soul, then ; a future and eternal state of righteous retribution ; the being, attributes, and moral government of God ; will any one say that these are doctrines too incredible to be received as truths, or of too little importance to be made known ?\* Only suppose these doctrines to be in reality infallible truths, which men had either failed to discover, or had lost after having been before known ; and what occasion can be imagined more worthy of divine interposition, than that of revealing them to mankind with their proper evidence, and with all their sanctifying influence ? For how infinitely important to a moral and immortal being must be that knowledge, which is not only to reveal to him his eternal destiny, but to put him upon the course, that is to prepare him for it ! How sublime, and how inestimable the object, which religion and religion alone exhibits, as the ground of supernatural interposition ! An object, that embraces the highest interests of an intelligent, a moral, and an immortal being ;—the only being in this world, which, in these respects, bears the image of the Creator ;—the interests, not of an individual only, but of a whole race ; and not for a limited time, but for an endless duration.

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\* Campbell on Miracles, p. 89.

Allow to the considerations, which have now been suggested, their due weight, and who will pronounce it incredible, that the Author of nature should manifest himself, and discover his agency in any other way, than by the regular operation of the established laws of the universe? Who will say that it is so improbable, as to render the pretence of such an interposition sufficient to destroy the credit of an account, bearing otherwise all the marks of sincerity and truth? Instead of any antecedent presumption against such interposition, I am persuaded that every reflecting mind will perceive some positive reasons beforehand for expecting it; such as to add some confirmation to the testimony of our sacred writers, to those miracles, which proved the divine mission of the Author of our religion.

The question, which next presents itself, is, whether there be any peculiar incredibility in the nature or the circumstances of the particular miracles ascribed to Moses and to Jesus Christ, as we have the account of them in the sacred writings.

Now to give intrinsic credibility to an account of miraculous interposition, there must be an occasion worthy of it;—worthy, that is, of calling forth the direct and visible agency of the Author of nature. If it be a mere exhibition of power, adapted only to astonish or amuse, there will be a strong presumption against it; so also, if the occasion is trifling or absurd. But no occasion more important or purpose more worthy of God to interpose can be imagined, than that, which called forth the mighty works, by which

Moses and Jesus Christ gave proof of their divine mission.

Besides the occasion and the purpose, there may be attendant circumstances also to confirm the testimony, or to weaken its force. Suppose them to purport to have been performed only in the presence of those, who were already believers in the doctrine, which they were intended to establish, and who were, therefore, previously prepared to receive them readily; suppose them to have been published long after they were alleged to have taken place, and when the means of detection, if they were forgeries, no longer existed; suppose them to have been published in a distant country, and not where the transactions took place, and among those, who, having been eye and ear witnesses, could verify the account or confute it; it is evident, that under such circumstances, the force of the whole evidence would be impaired.

But how different from all this is the ground upon which our faith rests in relation to the Christian miracles; performed, not in confirmation of the received doctrine, but to overthrow it; not in the presence of those only, who were predisposed to believe, but of those who were hostile to the cause; where the transactions took place, and while the memory of them was recent and fresh.

Some account of the miracles of Moses and of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and observations on their nature, the purposes for which they were performed, and the circumstances which attended them,

will enable us to judge, whether they lie exposed to suspicion on the ground of either of these considerations.

And first, as to the miracles ascribed to Moses. Their immediate design, we know, was to compel the King of Egypt to allow the nation, he had so long oppressed and enslaved, to depart from his land, and return to that of their Fathers. But this, though the immediate design, was not the ultimate or chief purpose. An object far more important, an end more worthy of divine interposition, is to be discovered, which enabled the Jewish Leader to deliver the favored people from their bondage, and conduct them in triumph to the borders of the promised land.

The great purpose they were designed to accomplish was, partly by their direct and immediate effects, and partly by their remote tendency, through that revelation from God which they were to be the means of introducing, to correct the prevailing idolatry and polytheism, and to bring men back to the true religion and the worship of the one true God. And what better adapted, than they were, to produce these effects? Deplorable ignorance and gross idolatry every where prevailed. The knowledge of the true God, of his worship, and of his laws was lost, not only among those nations, where the father of the faithful had sojourned with his family as pilgrims, but among the polished Egyptians. These indeed, though the most learned and refined of all the inhabitants of the earth, had retained less, perhaps, than almost any other, of the primitive simplicity of pure religion, and

had adopted the most extravagant and senseless system of Polytheism.

The Israelites had long been held in bondage by them, and though kept distinct from the Egyptians by some of their customs and habits, as well as by their having had a particular part of the country assigned to them for their settlement; yet it is manifest they had become infected in no small degree with the Egyptian idolatry. Now let us consider the miracles of Moses as intended at once to effect the deliverance of the Israelites, and to display both to them and the Egyptians the power of the true God, and the vanity and folly of their idol deities; and we shall see a striking propriety and significance in the very nature of the miracles themselves. For they were aimed at the very fundamental principles of the Egyptian polytheism. The plagues brought upon Pharaoh and Egypt were not mere arbitrary inflictions of chastisement and unmeaning exertions of power. In several of them, if not in every one, God did in fact, to use the words of the sacred historian, "execute judgment on the very gods of Egypt themselves."\* The Nile, which by annually overflowing its banks, fertilized the soil, and rendered Egypt one of the most fruitful countries in the world, was regarded by its inhabitants as their great benefactor. It was the object of their religious veneration. And it has been thought, not without reason, to have received their supreme national worship under the name of Osiris.

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\* Numbers, xxxiii. 4; Exodus, xii. 12.

When, therefore, at the command of Moses, Aaron stretched forth his rod over the river of Egypt, and its waters became blood, and the fishes in them died; not only a distressing calamity was brought on the land, but the power of Jehovah and the folly of their idolatry were signally manifested. It was again on the bank of the Nile, in the morning, that Moses was directed to meet Pharaoh, when he came down to the water, probably to pay his devotions there, and there in his presence to call for swarms of flies to cover the land of Egypt. It is remarkable, that the worship of the fly originated in Egypt. Could the power and universal dominion of the true God, and the entire folly of their idolatry be more effectually taught them, than in thus making the very object of their subordinate veneration, in the face of their supreme divinity, and in defiance of his power, the instrument of inflicting on them a grievous calamity?

It is well known that Egypt was remarkable for that most absurd of all the forms of ancient polytheism, — brute worship; — and, however incredible the fact may seem to an enlightened Christian, on account of its extreme absurdity, that this worship was not confined to the more noble and useful of the animal kingdom, but descended also to the noxious and the vile. We find, that when the children of Israel first came into Egypt, a separate portion of the country was assigned them for this very reason, that their employment was to breed up for domestic use and for sacrifice to God, the very animals, which the Egyptians held sacred, and worshipped as emblems



of the Deity. "For every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians." We see then a peculiar propriety and important design in the deadly murrain, by which the cattle in the land of Egypt were destroyed ; an event by which they must have seen, had they not been wonderfully infatuated, that their Apis had as little power as their Osiris, to stand before Jehovah.

The preternatural darkness, which was brought on the land, was a judgment directed, not against any peculiarity of the Egyptian idolatry, but against the very first principles of the Eastern Paganism. For, through the whole eastern world, light and darkness were considered as the two great contending powers of nature, the one the emblem and the author of all good, the other the emblem and the source of all evil. He, then, who had a manifest control over these, was superior to their greatest divinities, and able to hold them in subjection.

Thus were the Mosaic miracles, in their nature and in their design, worthy of the Deity. They were to manifest to the nation of Israel, to the Egyptians, to surrounding nations, to which their history was known, and through them to the whole earth, that Jehovah alone was the true God, whom all the earth should obey ; and that all the objects of the heathen worship, — whether the deified souls of departed men, or the great powers of nature, or the great bodies of the universe, or the elements, or the beasts of the earth, or mere images of wood and stone, the works of men's hands, — were vanity and a lie ; altogether without

power to save or to destroy, and without any claim to the homage of reasonable beings.

The same observations, which have been made on the nature and design of the miracles of Moses, may be applied to those also of later prophets. They may be applied to the miraculous passage of the Jordan, as to that of the Red Sea. The contest of Elijah with the prophets of Baal had this for its express purpose, to show, that Jehovah alone was God. "The God who answereth by fire," said the prophet, "let him be God." We accordingly find, that the people understood the result of the trial as decisive in proving, not the superior, but the sole claim of Jehovah to the worship of men.

As to the miracles of our Saviour, I have occasion to say but little to show the importance of their design, and their propriety and significancy.

To confirm the divine mission of the founder of the Christian religion was their immediate design. Their importance then is identified with that of the religion they were wrought to introduce and establish. If the instructions of that religion were of sufficient moment to be communicated by a Revelation from God, the means, by which this revelation was to be communicated and attested, were also worthy of a divine interposition; and it was not unworthy of the Deity to give to the person employed in this communication the power of clearly proving himself to be a messenger from God.

Now the miracles which Jesus Christ performed, and which his apostles performed in his name, were

for this express purpose. They were appealed to, as the testimony of God, because they were "such works, as no man could perform, except God were with him." Not one of them was of a trivial nature; not one of them was performed for a trifling purpose; most of them promoted some benevolent purpose, and were thus suitable to the nature and spirit of the religion they were to introduce; were correspondent to our best ideas of the beneficent Author of nature; and by manifesting that the same benevolence was active in the introduction of the Christian religion, as is visible in the whole frame and course of nature, they gave a new proof that it had the same almighty and benevolent Being for its author.

The miracles of Christ were subservient to a still further purpose. They served to illustrate and exemplify some of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel.

I will instance in two of them only; the doctrine of pardon, and that of a future resurrection. The former of these was illustrated in a very familiar manner by the power, so frequently exercised by the Saviour, of removing the bodily maladies, with which men were afflicted. He took care occasionally to point out the analogy between this, and relieving them from the natural or judicial effects of their moral disorders; by applying to the former case the appropriate language of the latter, and telling them that he did it for this very purpose, "that they might know, that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins."

The doctrine of a general resurrection and a judg-

ment to come, which made an essential part of his religion, was also illustrated and rendered credible by the power he exercised in several instances of raising the dead to life again ; and especially by his own resurrection. When he called forth Lazarus from the tomb, and when he came forth himself and appeared alive to his disciples, he demonstrated, that the doctrine, which he had so constantly taught them, was worthy of their acceptance ; “ that it was not a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead.”

We find, then, in the nature of the Mosaic and Christian miracles, and the purposes for which they were wrought, no intrinsic improbability to impair the credibility of the records in which they are contained. On the contrary we do find them marked by eminent propriety and suitableness, worthy of the majesty and the benevolence of the Great Author of nature, and well adapted to accomplish his great and benevolent purposes. It remains then only to examine the circumstances which attended them, and see whether these were such as to diminish the credit due to the relation of them in the Sacred Books.

Had Moses and Jesus Christ performed the miracles, they are stated to have performed, only in the presence of their friends and followers, and after the religion they introduced had been established by other means ; witnessed, therefore, by those only, who were already predisposed to admit their evidence ; we should be justified in listening to the testimony with caution, and subjecting it to a very careful and rigid scrutiny. For men readily give their faith to that,

which comes in confirmation of their previous opinions, and in support of cherished interests and established customs. But you may be very sure, that they have not been induced lightly and without what they believe to be strong evidence to give credit to that, which obliges them to give up those opinions, and interests, and customs, and exchange them for others, of an opposite character, and which subject them to great sacrifices.

Now how does the case stand in this respect, as to the miracles in question? Before whom were the miracles of Moses performed, by which the deliverance of his nation was procured? Was it before those only, who were predisposed to admit his claim, as a prophet of God, or was it before the very persons who contested it? The King of Egypt, whose strongest passions and political interests were combined, both against the person by whom, and the cause in which they were performed; and the wise men of his court, who were sent for, for the express purpose of withstanding the prophet, and doing away the evidence of his miracles.

Before whom did Elijah bring down fire from heaven to consume the offering, as a proof that he was a prophet of the true God? Was it before men only of his own party and his own opinion, who were disposed to believe, as they were desirous to support his pretensions? It was before the priests of Baal, who were opposed to him by the most powerful interests and the strongest prejudices

and passions ; and the nation of Israel, who had forsaken the service of God, for the worship of Baal.

Who, also, were the witnesses of our Saviour's miracles ? Were they those only, who were already become his disciples ? Were they not promiscuous crowds of strangers and unbelievers, as well as friends and followers ; the Scribes and Pharisees, the determined opposers of his religion ? And did even they ever venture to call in question the reality or the miraculous nature of his works ? Did they not on the contrary, by ascribing them to the agency of evil spirits, implicitly confess them to be above human power ? Why also did they express their wrath against those, who had been the subjects of his healing or restoring power ? To prevent the increase of his followers, we see them, not attempting to expose a deception as to the fact of his having given sight to one who was born blind, but putting the man himself out of the synagogue ; and with the same spirit consulting to put Lazarus to death, that he might be no longer before them a living witness of that miraculous power, the effects of which they could not deny, but were determined to bear down the cause it was exerted to support.

Now it is a remarkable fact, that the miracles recorded in the Bible are the only ones on record, which possess this mark of truth. No other instance can be adduced of a series of miracles or even a single supernatural act, performed for the express purpose of introducing a new religion among those, who before had all the prejudices of education in opposition to it.

The prodigies related by heathen historians were performed only in heathen countries, and in support of a religion already established and possessing the attachment of the people ; and those, which have been claimed by any sect of Christians in modern times, have appeared only in those places, where the faith they were intended to support, already prevailed. They have never been wrought, where alone they were needed, in pagan or Mahometan countries, or in places, where the Christian faith was held in a different form.

Another ground of faith or of doubt is drawn from the record, and the publication of what is declared to be supernatural ; whether they were at or near the time in which they took place ; or, after lying long concealed and unknown, were at length brought to light, when no means remained of confronting the account with the testimony of contemporary witnesses. In this respect let the miracles recorded in the Scriptures be brought into comparison with any others the best authenticated, which have been published to the world.

The miracles of the Jewish Lawgiver were not only recorded in the annals of the nation ; but they were made the foundation of Institutions, which were observed in remembrance of some of the most remarkable of them by the whole nation, from the very day in which they were performed. Thus was instituted the pascal supper in memory of that signal deliverance, when, on the night of their departure from Egypt, the first-born of the children of Israel were saved,

while the first-born of the land of Egypt were destroyed. The annual solemn observance of this with great formality was a perpetual remembrancer of the fact it was to commemorate, and was wholly unintelligible but with the acknowledgment of that fact. So also the Pentecost, in commemoration of the giving of the Law from Sinai; the Feast of Tabernacles, in which the Israelites were required annually to live seven days in booths in remembrance of their wandering in the wilderness, when they were without fixed habitations, and were obliged to live in tents and booths; (such an institution could not have been imposed on a people to perpetuate the remembrance of a fact of great national interest and public notoriety, which had never taken place;) the brazen serpent, preserved till the time of King Hezekiah; the pot of manna, and Aaron's rod, which budded, appointed to be preserved with religious care for the express purpose of a token to future generations; and finally, the Ark of the Covenant itself, with its sacred deposit, the tables of stone; all these, with several other monuments, besides the written record of the facts on which they were founded, or to which they alluded, — which were also preserved with more sacred care than the annals of any other ancient nation, — were perennial witnesses to succeeding generations of the reality of these wonderful interpositions.

Of the miracles of our Saviour, it is necessary only to say, that the record and public knowledge of them — that is, the books that contain the account of them, — may be traced back to the time, when the eye and



ear witnesses of the facts were yet alive ; — further, that monuments of them are to be seen at this day in the existence of that religion, which they ushered into the world ; and in the numberless authentic records of the sufferings and martyrdom of its first confessors, who laid down their lives as witnesses of the reality of those facts.

Now what is thus true of the Scripture miracles, cannot be said of any others which have usually been put in competition with them. It cannot be said, for example, of those which were attributed by the early enemies of Christianity to Apollonius. We have no evidence, that those miracles were ever heard of, till more than a hundred years after the time in which they were said to have been performed ; when there was not a person remaining among the living to testify to their truth, or to detect their falsehood. No contemporary record of them could be produced ; no intermediate knowledge of them could be proved ; no monuments of them were in existence ; no effects of them were remaining. It cannot be said of those attributed in the fourth century to the famous Gregory, who flourished about a century before, but of whose wonderful works no mention was made by his contemporaries. It cannot be said of those attributed in more modern times to the founder of the order of Jesuits, and his scarcely less celebrated associate, familiarly known, as the Apostle to the East Indies about the middle of the sixteenth century.

But of the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles the publication was not left to the historian of another

age. They were constantly appealed to by Christ himself as the infallible testimony of the Father to his mission and authority. "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works which I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." The history of them was published during the life of those who were the witnesses, and probably the subjects of his miracles. And during the whole of the interval which preceded their publication, the Gospel was preached by his disciples, and the power of miracles, which he had communicated to them, continued to be exercised. But suppose that, instead of this, the Evangelists, who give the history of our Saviour's life written at the time, had been silent on this point, and the account of miracles attributed to him had first appeared in the works of the Christian writers of the second century; who would have thought the account thus given a reasonable ground of faith? Or who would have given credit to the story, had this part of it first come to light in some distant country, with no evidence that it had ever been heard of at the place, where the events are declared to have taken place, or by the people who purport to have been witnesses of them?

But something further is needed, in order to give the highest and surest ground of confidence. Though published at the time and the place of the transactions in question, and in circumstances accordingly which furnished the means of ascertaining the truth; have we good reason to feel assured, that those means were faithfully used? Were the works

of our Saviour actually exposed to the test of examination, so as to preclude all room for question as to the fact itself, and as to its supernatural character? It would certainly detract from the fulness of the evidence, and somewhat weaken the confidence otherwise felt, to know that this was not the case, or that the circumstances of the transactions were such, as to make it highly probable, that no such examination took place; either because there was a predisposition to receive them in all those to whom they were proposed; or because those only had the power of detecting the imposition, if there were any, who were most interested in its concealment.

Now this is the main ground,—not the only one, but one which alone would be sufficient,—upon which we reject every pretence, as far as I know, of heathen miracles, or of Christian miracles alledged to have been performed after Christianity was established, and in any country, where it had become the prevailing religion.

Take, for an example, the prodigies related by the Roman historians. They were always made subservient to some great political purpose; always on the side of power, and for the support of power; never in opposition to it and in defiance of it. It was sometimes to confirm the authority of the prince, by conferring on him a sacred character; as in the supernatural cures ascribed by the historian to one of the Roman Emperors. Sometimes to strengthen the arm of government, and prepare the populace for some great enterprize; as in some of the prodigies men-

tioned in the early annals of that nation. And sometimes, as is related in a single instance, to inspire the confidence of the soldiery in their general, as being a favorite of heaven, and under its special guidance and protection.

Now in all such cases, nothing like a fair and faithful examination is even supposable. Between the influence of interest and power on the one hand, and of superstition and credulity on the other, neither is the disposition to examine to be found, nor the means and the opportunity of doing it with safety and to any good purpose.

The same may be said of the miracles of the middle ages ; indeed of all pretences to the exertion of miraculous power, after the religion of Jesus was the prevalent faith, was connected with civil government, and had both the popular opinion and the power of the State on its side. Who indeed will be inclined to inquire with very rigorous fidelity, where it is dangerous to doubt, and fatal to deny ?

How different in this circumstance were the miracles of Moses and of Jesus Christ ! To see that the former were actually the subject of fair examination, we need only attend to their simple recital. For what purpose were they wrought ? Not to flatter the pride, nor to establish the authority, nor to aid the purposes ; but to humble the spirit, and subdue the obstinacy, of a powerful monarch. They were wrought indeed for the benefit of a nation ; but of a nation, not in power, but in the lowest state of degradation and servitude ; neither were they to conform to their

prejudices, nor bend to their wishes. And they were sometimes employed to silence their unreasonable murmurs, and to conquer their turbulent and rebellious spirits.

Those of our Lord and his apostles were exhibited, neither before those who were previously prepared to receive them on a slight examination, nor by those who had the power to check the impertinence of a skeptical curiosity, and silence by authority the cavils of unbelief. They were not to countenance, but to overthrow, the established doctrines, and prevailing opinions. The witnesses of those miracles were converts to his religion, which those very miracles had converted. And they were converts, not to a triumphant but to a suffering sect; not to a party, which could promote their interests, or gratify their ambition; but to one which compelled them to abandon their favorite notions, and to resign every worldly prospect of interest and ambition.

This important point of difference between the Christian miracles and all others cannot be too attentively considered. The former were performed for the purpose of introducing a new religion, and establishing the divine mission of its founder; the latter were always pretended in support of a system or a sect already in power. The former ceased at the very time, when having established the credit of the religion and its founder, it would have been in the power of the teachers of it to impose them on the world without the danger of detection; the latter then only ventured the pretence of miracles, when the

popular prejudice and the civil power were already enlisted in their cause.

Now that institutions already established should pretend to have their divine origin and authority confirmed by miracles, when they have already the support of popular belief, and their leaders are held in popular veneration, and when political and religious interests have become closely united, is by no means surprising. It is easy to see, that under such circumstances, they might be accompanied with such kind and degree of historical evidence, as it might be difficult to invalidate.

But for a few men without power, without learning, without wealth, to introduce a new faith and new institutions; and without any of the political advantages mentioned in the other case, to procure its reception on the particular evidence of miracles; is an entirely different thing. And this is a fact peculiar to the Christian religion.

We return then with confidence to the point from which we set out; and assert the completeness of the evidence, by which those mighty works are established, to which Jesus appeals as the proof of his divine mission, and which are the ground upon which we acknowledge and commemorate him as our Master and our Saviour. "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works which I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."

## CHAPTER XII.

EVIDENCE OF THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY  
FROM THE SUCCESS OF ITS FIRST PREACHERS.

AN argument for the divine origin of Christianity may be drawn from the fact of its existence and prevalence in the world. It is a fact to be accounted for; and as the human means that were employed were obviously inadequate to the purpose, it must be referred to the interposition of superior power. This was perceived at an early date by one of the Jewish Council, who used it as an argument for refraining from all interference with the new faith. "If," said he, "this counsel or this work be of man, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

We, who live now, know, that the work, in which the apostles were then engaged, did not come to nought. The counsel did prevail, the work did succeed. Full eighteen centuries have passed away; and the doctrine which they taught, and the faith which they propagated, far from having perished with its Author, has survived to the present day. Not only has it survived. It constitutes at this moment the religion of the most enlightened and civilized portions of the world; monuments of its existence and of its power are seen,—not only in the institu-

tions it has established, the distinguished names it has enrolled, the martyrs that have freely poured out their blood in its cause, the writings it has called forth in its defence;—but in its influence upon institutions and laws, upon the customs and manners of society, upon morals, upon education, upon government, upon all the relations and interests of the world.

Now these vast and permanent effects are to be accounted for. They must have had an adequate cause. Two only can be assigned. We must either say, that the human means used at first are sufficient to account for the success of those, by whose agency the Gospel was so rapidly spread over the world, and for all the phenomena of its present existence and past history; or that its origin and its support were, as its first teachers asserted, from above.

Now I readily admit, that it cannot be made to appear that there was anything extraordinary, much less miraculous, in the continuance of Christianity in all its present power and effects, supposing it already established. The human means now everywhere employed are sufficient for this purpose. For it has now all the influences in its favor, which at first were arrayed against it. Education, custom, antiquity, civil power, now lend it their aid. It is among the first instructions that are instilled into the infant mind; it is blended intimately with all the institutions of society and with all the business and interests of life.

When, therefore, we speak of the present existence of Christianity, in all its extent, its power, and its blessings, as a standing proof of its truth and its divine



origin, let not the assertion be misunderstood. It is such a proof, not in itself alone, but in connexion with the authentic history of its first preaching and early reception.

If the continuance and permanence of a doctrine were in themselves proof of a divine origin, or of a divine interposition, it could not be shown, that the Mahometan faith, and indeed that almost any form of pagan idolatry, has not as firm a ground to rest upon as Christianity. They have lasted for ages, and have spread over extensive countries. But this proves only with respect to them, as it does with respect to the continuance of Christianity, that the means are adequate to the end.

The difference is this, and here lies the force of the argument. The Christian finds, what the professor of no other faith can pretend to find, in the first propagation, reception, and spread of his religion, facts which can be accounted for only by supposing the reality of the miraculous power, which was asserted by its teachers to have accompanied its propagation.

The present existence of Christianity, in all the circumstances in which it exists, is fully accounted for, if we admit the truth of its public history ;—carrying that history back from the present time, through all the changes of its condition, to the time when it was first preached by its Author and his disciples. But, if that testimony of history be set aside, it would not be possible to find any other ground, upon which to account for the phenomena thus presented to us, which would not be attended

with insuperable difficulties. This is a mode of pursuing inquiry, which we think to be correct and safe in other cases. Take an example sufficiently similar.

In 1517, a little more than three centuries ago, England was a Catholic country. There was probably not a Protestant living on the island. In a century from that time, it was a Protestant country. How was such a change effected? The history of that period tells us. It tells us what causes were put in operation; and we see that they were fully sufficient to produce all, that we are called upon to account for. Now until the truth of that history is impeached, until it is shown that it is not to be relied upon, would not any one, who should set about investigating the causes of that great event, be thought to pursue a strange course, were he to begin by setting aside that whole history, and seeking for the causes elsewhere? Again; two hundred and fifty years ago, whoever should have landed on any part of the American shore between the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi, would have found it inhabited by no human beings, but savages in the lowest state of barbarism. What miracle has produced all that we now see in the place of what was then? The causes and the means in their whole detail, by which these astonishing changes have been brought about, are matter of historic record; and they fully account for all that we see. Will you now reject these records, and expect to find yourself better satisfied with some other way of accounting for the total change in the face of this wide region?

The same mode of proceeding, to which common sense leads us in such cases, let us apply to the case in consideration.

From the time that Christianity ceased to be persecuted, and became the religion of the State, in the beginning of the fourth century, till the present day, I have before remarked, we have nothing to account for; — there are no facts that require us to search for deep and mysterious causes. The testimony of history is full and satisfactory. The Christian and the unbeliever agree so far in resting their faith on the same historical authority. And can any good reason be assigned, why their respect for history should stop here? why, in tracing back its records further, and following its earlier course, they should not still agree in admitting those records as good evidence? Is it reasonable to admit their testimony just so far, as it suits our argument, and then to set it aside, when it ceases to favor the opinion which we wish to support? Now the same voice of history, which assures us, that after the time of which we are speaking, Christianity, allied to the interests and the power of the world, neither needed nor obtained any supernatural support; asserts also, that before that time, and especially at first, it did accomplish objects and produce effects, which no finite power could produce; and that its ministers were clothed with a power from above, by which they were produced. Shall we in the one case listen to this voice, and not in the other? In both cases alike, admit the truth of history, and all is accounted for. Reject it, and you have to seek

another explanation. Can you find one as consistent, as natural, as satisfactory ?

The impression made by these views is greatly strengthened by several considerations, naturally connected with them.

The first and most obvious is that, which relates to the magnitude and importance of the event in question. To see this in its full light, you have only to think what were the vast changes produced immediately by the religion of Jesus, wherever it was received. Extending, as it soon did, beyond the limits of the largest empire that had ever been formed ; it everywhere effected a salutary change in the domestic and social relations, and in the most important interests of men, by the new views which it gave of God and of duty, and the moral influence which thus everywhere accompanied it.

Now consider what it was, and what a power it must have required, not over a few individuals, not within a narrow space, but throughout extensive regions and over many nations, to establish a new religion, and to persuade men to quit the faith of their ancestors, and forsake the worship they had been accustomed to regard with reverence, in order to adopt one, by which all their previous opinions were overthrown, and their most cherished customs and usages were set aside. Great changes require great motives, strong reasons, and clear and full evidence. To overcome the resistance of education, tradition, superstition, and worldly policy combined, something more must be necessary than merely to propose the new doctrine,

however by its nature it might recommend itself to their understandings or their hearts.

But was the Christian doctrine such, as thus to recommend it to those, to whom it was first sent, preoccupied as they were by institutions of external splendor, and of imposing pomp and ceremony; and a worship and a morality of great indulgence? Certain it is, that besides the undervaluing of all mere ceremonial observances, which could hardly be well relished at first by either a Jew or a Gentile, Christianity required of all, who professed its faith, a strictness of virtue and a purity of life, to which men are perhaps not more easily persuaded, than to a change of faith. Now when we think of the loose principles of the pagan morality, accommodated as it was to their loose theology; of the false glosses also, and loose interpretations of the Jewish Doctors; can we suppose them very ready to receive such a morality, as that taught by Christ? Will not such a morality seem to them revolting by its austerity, severe and unreasonable, unadapted to human nature? I mean when it is first proposed to them. Will it not require overwhelming evidence, to induce them to listen to its demands upon them? Especially will not this be their feeling, if besides this great change in their course of life, it also calls upon them to make great sacrifices, and subjects them to dangers and sufferings? If such a religion professes to rest upon miraculous proof, will it be received without examination of the proof it offers, and unless the result of that examination is satisfactory?

A second consideration relates to the instruments and means, by which so great effects were brought about. What were those instruments, what those means? Taking into consideration only the visible human means, were they at all adequate to the effects confessedly produced? Here was no authority of a powerful state, which could enforce the laws, it saw fit to impose; no arms of a victorious chief, tendering the law with the one hand, and the uplifted sword in the other. No aid and no countenance can the labors of the apostles be pretended to have received from any secular power.

When we thus consider the effect in question, and the human means employed in bringing it about, we are filled with a deep sense of the contrast,—of the disproportion of the one to the other. And we find, in the history of the world, nothing that furnishes a parallel.

For what, I ask, was the success of the philosophers of Greece, with all the advantages they possessed, in any attempts for drawing off that people,—fickle and addicted to change, as they were,—from the absurdities of their polytheism to a rational faith and a purer worship? How limited in extent and duration was the influence of their lectures! Where was the single city, that was induced by the sublime discourses of Plato, decorated with all the learning and science of that great master of eloquence, to exchange the prevailing idolatry for a rational faith? Yet Paul, contemptible in speech, as he confesses himself to be, in the provincial dialect of Tarsus,

preaching the doctrines of Christ, in a short time established churches in the most populous cities of Greece, persuading men to turn from sin to righteousness, "and from the worship of idols to serve the living and true God."

How different, again, was the success of those first ministers of the Gospel, from that which has attended any attempts in succeeding ages, to extend the boundaries of the Redeemer's kingdom by the conversion of heathen nations, or of the Jews. And in that difference, what satisfactory proof have we of the truth and reality of the mighty works alleged to have been performed when such effects were produced. For, if we except the single circumstance that miraculous powers ceased after the time of the Apostles and their immediate disciples; there is no point, in which the first heralds of the Gospel had the advantage over missionaries of succeeding ages. Yet, during the middle ages and down to modern times, how little was effected, by all their pious and faithful labors, in the conversion of the heathen. How few, in the course of centuries, were persuaded, by the mere preaching of the Gospel, to renounce their idolatry.

Christians, undoubtedly, such as they were, were made by *conquest*, and their descendants became so by education, and thus the boundaries of Christendom were occasionally enlarged, and countries and nations were successively added. But here there are no points of resemblance between the cases, as to the great question at issue. Conversion by force and by

persuasion, by physical power and by moral influence, admit of no comparison. Will it be said that this argument is weakened by recent more encouraging success of exertions for the conversion of heathen nations? It will be said, I think, without due consideration. For, the facility with which the whole population of some Islands in the Pacific have been induced to give up their superstitions, and to receive the institutions of Christianity, and put themselves under the instructions of its ministers, a satisfactory account may be given; drawn partly from peculiarities in the condition of those Islanders; and partly from other motives and other interests being combined with those of religion; and from wise and efficient means employed, adapted in the best manner to effect the purpose.

Not only is the argument for a supernatural power and miraculous evidence accompanying the first preaching of the Gospel unimpaired by the fact in question; but we see also, by these instances of success, that Christians have no reason to be discouraged from attempts for the conversion of the heathen by another process, by other means than have usually been employed, or by a better adaptation of those, which have heretofore been attended with little success. They may not expect their efforts to be crowned with success, — however faithful, pious, disinterested, — while they confine themselves to the same means, which were used by the primitive teachers, without the same manifestations of a divine power to accompany their preaching. And the failure of success in



this course, instead of leading them to abandon the work as hopeless, should induce them to the more zealous application of other means, that promise a better result.

Should other nations, now in a barbarous or semi-barbarous state, be brought hereafter to receive Christianity, by having it come to them accompanied with a variety of intellectual, social, and domestic improvements, with a change of their condition by the introduction of useful arts, and the manners and customs of civilized life ; it would not affect the force of the argument, which has been urged for the divine interposition when it was first introduced into the world. For then, the means employed, in all the circumstances of the case, might be adequate to the effect.

And the effect itself also would be of a different character from that which is attributed to the first preaching of the Gospel. In the latter case, sudden, rapid, instantaneous ; without any extraneous circumstances to facilitate its reception ; in the former, by a slow, gradual, and almost imperceptible progress, and accompanied with powerful extraneous recommendations. In the one instance, as our Saviour expresses it, like the lightning, flashing in a moment from one end of heaven to the other ; in the other, as in another case he describes it, resembling more the process of vegetation ; the small seed drawing a fertilizing influence from the earth into which it is cast, and as it rises and expands, shooting forth branches in every direction, till it becomes a mighty tree. The

one, in fine, indicating in no equivocal manner, the direct and immediate hand of heaven ; the other its ordinary agency by the common and established laws of the universe.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ESSENTIAL AGREEMENT AMONG CHRISTIANS RESPECTING THE TRUTHS TAUGHT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

IF God has spoken, it is our duty to hear. It is our duty to listen to whatever instructions He has seen fit in any way to give us ; to endeavor to understand clearly what they are, and to carry into practice what they require. It is the same God, who has spoken to us in the constitution of nature, by the ministry of the prophets under the former dispensation, and in the Gospel by the voice of his Son, Jesus Christ. This idea it is necessary often to repeat ; for however obvious a truth it is, that what is essential in religion must always be the same, as eternal and immutable, as the nature of Him, who is its object, and who has revealed it to us, there is yet a constant tendency in men to wrong apprehensions and misconception on the subject. We are apt to speak and to think of the religion of nature, the religion of the Jews, and Christianity, as different schemes ; whereas in all that is properly religion, they are the same. The same God is the object of worship in each ; the same spirit is inculcated, the same principles, the same duties, the same hopes. They differ as to the degree of clearness with which the same truths are made known ; as to the number of subordinate truths connected with them ; and they are accommodated to

the time and people for whom they were designed in many circumstances of external form and peculiarities of positive institution. It is a mistake to imagine, that the Mosaic Institution was intended to change any of the principles of natural and essential religion; and equally so to suppose that Christianity was designed to abrogate or to supercede either the fundamental truths or the spirit of the Jewish religion. What Moses and the prophets had taught, we are not to expect to find contradicted by another Messenger, sent with further instructions from the same author of light, and God over all. As it was the same God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past to the fathers by the prophets, that hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, we shall doubtless find the New Testament giving us the same account, which we have before found in the Old, of his perfections, his government, his will, and his purposes.

I shall endeavor to show that this is the case, by a brief statement of what appear to be the principal instructions of the New Testament, and it will be acknowledged to be so by all, who receive those writings as the foundation of their religious faith, whatever differences of opinion there may be between them, as to some articles of the Christian doctrine.

Thus, in the first place, we find in the New Testament no direct instruction respecting the being and perfections of God, no positive assertion of them. But we find what is much more,— we find them constantly implied, in every book, in every page, I

may almost say, in every sentence. That they should not make any part of the express instructions of Christ or his apostles, we can see the best reasons. Those instructions were addressed to persons, who had by previous revelations been taught the worship of the true God. They were addressed to the descendants of Abraham, by whom, and in whose family, the early patriarchal revelations were transmitted down ; and to the disciples of Moses, the founder of the Jewish polity, and deliverer of that law, the very basis of which was the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, and him alone. With the exception of our Saviour's discourse to the woman of Samaria, and Paul's address to the philosophers at Athens, we find, as we might expect, through the whole New Testament the doctrines respecting the being, perfections, and worship of God, not taught, but constantly supposed to be well understood, and received as truths, about which there was no question. So distinct and frequent are the notices, and so unequivocal the expressions which relate to the attributes of the Deity, that amidst the discordant and various opinions adopted by the several sects of Christians, and with whatever zeal they have been maintained in opposition to one another, neither of them is denied by any.

All Christians, I observe, unite in maintaining with equal zeal the Divine Unity, in asserting that the New Testament represents God as one Being, to whom belongs every possible and conceivable perfection, natural and moral. This doctrine is as strenuously insisted on by those, who hold to a trinity of

persons in the Deity, as by those, who believe in a personal unity. Now whatever seeming difficulty there may be in reconciling these apparently contradictory opinions; particularly as none have ever pretended to explain or to understand what is meant by a person as distinguished from a being, or to show wherein any number of distinct persons differ from the same number of separate beings; whatever difficulty, I say, or apparent inconsistency this may be thought to involve, it will only serve to show, that the unity of God is so clearly implied in the New Testament, that all agree in admitting, that no other doctrine supposed to be contained in those writings is to be understood in a sense inconsistent with it. I know of nothing that fixes so decisively what is taught in the New Testament on this subject, as this universal consent as to the main doctrine and the term by which it is expressed, amidst so wide a diversity of opinions, some of which are to many minds absolutely irreconcilable with it.

The same remark might be made with respect to the several divine attributes. Opinions are held by one sect of Christians, which seem to their opponents to be inconsistent with the veracity of God, to impeach his justice, to undermine his holiness, or to set aside his mercy; and yet those who hold these opinions are no less strenuous assertors than others of each of these attributes, and would consider it an impious robbery to strip the divine nature of either of these perfections. What then is our conclusion, but that the language of Christ and his apostles is so clear and

distinct on these subjects, that no inconsistency is so hard to be received, as that the truth or holiness, justice or mercy of God are to be given up. We have here, then, a firm foundation and broad basis on which all Christians can stand together.

There is an equal consent, again, having its origin in the same clearness of the instructions of the New Testament, as to the character of the divine Government,—the government of providence over all, and the moral government over the rational creation. So frequently did the great teacher of Christianity inculcate the duties of a cheerful submission and pious trust in divine providence, and so various and strong were the expressions by which he chose to convey those instructions, that none are able so to misunderstand or to pervert them, as to make it a question, whether the world be under the care of the Creator. Without your heavenly Father a sparrow falls not to the ground. He clothes the lily of the field. He provides food for the birds of the air. He furnishes a supply for the most careless and improvident. He suffers not those to need it who toil not, who spin not, who gather not into store houses. The appeal is irresistible;—will he not clothe, will he not feed you? He that has read the Saviour's discourse, will not doubt whether the doctrine of a providence made a part of the faith he taught. But he taught the government of God in a higher sense. A government over reasonable beings, capable of virtue, having a sense of right and wrong, and accountable for their actions. This, too, no Christian does or can deny.

It is strenuously asserted by every sect and every denomination, whatever opinions, apparently inconsistent with a moral scheme, they may maintain.

Amidst the endless disputes of Christians respecting the natural state of man, — his power to do the will of God, the means by which he is to become a partaker of the benefits of the Gospel, the efficacy to be attributed to what was done or suffered by the Saviour, the connexion of faith and good works with human salvation, the nature of that change, and the power by which it is produced, which is denominated being born again, — amidst the endless disputes on these questions, there is enough maintained by them in common as the doctrine of Scripture for all the purposes of impression and practice, enough to fix the sentiment of a wise, righteous, and merciful moral government over the human race. Whatever other opinions may be maintained, that seem to be inconsistent with them, yet all equally maintain, that man is treated by Christianity as an accountable being; that he is addressed as being subject to a law, which he has power either to obey or disobey; that repentance and holiness are essential to secure the divine favor; and that impenitence and vice will not escape with impunity. All sects of Christians admit that the Scriptures inculcate the value of faith and the obligation of holiness, and that neither of them is complete without the other. However sharply they may contend for the preëminence of faith on the one hand, or of good works on the other, and may urge either of them to the neglect of the other, they will



own on both sides, that the Scriptures will dispense with neither of them. Whatever doubts may be felt as to the use of certain language in expressing, on the one hand, the merits of the Saviour and the benefits we derive from him, and on the other, the connexion of acceptance and final salvation with our personal holiness ;— all will acknowledge that the Scriptures represent our peace, reconciliation with God, and salvation, as by Jesus Christ ; and none will assert that final salvation is purchased for the unholy and impenitent, or that the unholy and impenitent will be partakers of it.

Once more, on this subject of the moral government of God, no diversity of language or opinion as to the separate sufficiency, or the necessity of coöperation of human and divine agency in producing holiness and procuring salvation, will shake its foundation. It stands sufficiently supported on what all allow to be the language of the Scriptures. In whatever sense it be understood that men are commanded to “work out their own salvation,” it does not prevent that God should be represented as “working in them ;” and on the other hand, whatever is supposed to be meant by God’s “working in men to will and to do,” it is admitted to consist with the obligation on their part “to work out their own salvation, even with fear and trembling.”

Another important part of the instructions of our Saviour and his apostles related to what we are to think of human nature and the human condition, its primitive and its present state. What is clear and

unquestioned on these subjects is of great importance, and in a high degree satisfactory. Neither the primitive state of innocence and favor with God, nor the present state of guilt and prevailing wickedness, will be denied by any. However we may vary in the construction we put on what the Scriptures teach us, as to the consequences of the first transgression with respect to hereditary and transmitted guilt, and with respect to the existence and the degree of natural depravity ; there is no controversy as to the representations they give of the actual darkness and wickedness of the world ; none as to the universal need of mercy, and of repentance in order to the recovery of the divine favor ; and none as to the aid they furnish, and the motives they supply to effect our deliverance from the darkness and the slavery of sin, and to give us light, liberty, and peace, in the favor of God.

Connected closely with this are the provisions, which the mercy of God has made for our relief, for our recovery, for the removal of our darkness and guilt, for delivering us from the dominion of sin, and receiving us by repentance and virtue to pardon, favor, and life. Here, also, amidst shades of difference, there is a sufficient foundation of opinions in common. We may raise questions, as to the Christian terms of acceptance with God ; but none of them are such as to impair our sense of the necessity of divine mercy, and that it is on mercy, in some way expressed, that all our hopes rest ; or on the other hand, to destroy the value of a good life, as if the mercy of God was to supersede the necessity of holiness. We may not

be able to settle the point of precedency between faith and repentance, as to the order of time, of value, or of efficacy, but that both are necessary will not be denied. We may dispute, whether justification be by faith or works, but on neither side will it be contended, that it can be without either of them.

The Gospel reveals a future life, a resurrection, and just retribution. These doctrines of vital interest, and above all others important to be received, and to be the foundation and the motive of the course of life we pursue, are taught with clearness, with frequency, and with impression. And they are alone enough to answer the great purposes of the Christian revelation, with whatever degrees of circumstantial ignorance and error they may be combined. These truths have not only been taught with authority, but confirmed by miracles, and especially by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, whatever questions may be raised on the subject, which leave us in possession of the doctrine itself, in those essential parts which have been stated, they are of little importance. Let us only be assured, that we are to live again after death; that the vital spark, which that event has extinguished, will be rekindled; and that the future state, to which we are destined, is to be a just retribution, an exact adjustment of our condition to our whole moral character and the improvement we have made of a state of moral discipline;—and the disputes that may be agitated, when we come to minute explanations, are of little comparative consideration.

We may speculate, for instance, on the nature of

the resurrection, and of the body in which we are to appear. Will it be the same body? will it be a material body? or are we to suppose that the resurrection has nothing to do with this material and corruptible body; that it has relation only to the revival of the same thinking, active, conscious *being*, with the capacity of action, enjoyment, and suffering, and with the consciousness of being the same that lived and acted here? Again; when is the future life to commence? Are we to pass immediately at death into that state, for which the present life is a probation? Or shall ages pass away, while this being is locked up in the slumber of the grave? Or shall this long interval of time be an intermediate state of incipient, but imperfect retribution? Of how little importance are these questions, either for motive or for comfort, if we be once fully satisfied of the certainty of the main fact, that suspended life will be again resumed, and that death, after a life of probation, will be succeeded by a life of righteous retribution!

Once more; what is to be the duration of the state after death, to good beings and to bad beings, to those who have well improved, and to those that have neglected the term of probation? Is it to be an unalterable state? absolutely hopeless and endless to the latter, as it is without fear and without the liability to change to the former? These questions are indeed deeply interesting, but they are not of vital importance. Howsoever they be answered, the most important fact remains untouched;—a righteous and impartial judgment, executed upon all; good men

rewarded far beyond their desert, and the impenitent wicked exposed to suffering equal to their demerits ; from which there is no escape, and for which there is no relief, but in the extinction of being itself, or a discipline by which their impenitence is subdued.

What I have endeavored to show with respect to a few points of Christian doctrine, might be shown, and with equal clearness, with respect to many, and perhaps all others, about which there has been a diversity of opinion. What is universally, or at least generally, agreed to be the doctrine taught in the New Testament amounts to something of great value, whatever importance Christians may attach to the subordinate points, in which their opinions are at variance, and however some of those differences may really affect the principles and the motives of our faith, and its practical influence.

I close by recalling attention to a thought which has already been more than once expressed, and of which, I think, we cannot be reminded too often,—that amidst the widest extremes of opinion, the great facts that support our faith are left us ; and what is essential in doctrine as a motive to a holy life, and to give support and comfort, is unaffected. We have still a glorious Gospel, breathing peace on earth, and proclaiming good will toward men. Sinners have the hope of pardon, and dying men the assurance of a resurrection. Christ has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, and through the grace of God will be the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. And the grace of God thus

bringing salvation is a doctrine according to godliness. It teaches all alike to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world.

## CHAPTER XIV.

JESUS, THE CHRIST, HIS PERSON, TITLES, AND  
OFFICES.

THE great truths which constitute the Christian doctrine may be conveniently distributed, for inquiry and discussion, into five classes.

1. Those truths which relate to God.
2. Those, which relate to Jesus Christ, and the purposes of his mission.
3. Those which relate to the moral nature of man, and his moral condition.
4. Those which relate to the several relations of men and their duties.
5. Those which relate to a future life.

On the first of these topics, the truths which relate to God, his character and government, it is unnecessary here to enlarge. We have already treated of them as they are found in the Religion of Nature, and the Revelation of the Old Testament, and have had occasion to remark, that they must be the same under any dispensation. The New Testament does not give a different description of them; it does but display them under other circumstances and with more striking illustrations in the life and doctrines of Jesus Christ who came to *show us the Father*.

We therefore proceed at once to the consideration of the truths which relate to Jesus Christ, and the purposes of his mission.

The terms employed by Peter, to express his own opinion, and that of his fellow disciples, respecting the person of their master, are those by which he is more frequently designated in the New Testament than by any other ; and although neither of them is appropriated exclusively to him, they seem to be applied to him, one of them prophetically, and the other historically in a peculiar sense. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." If we can ascertain the meaning of these terms, and the grounds of their application to Jesus by the sacred writers, we shall learn all that we need to know of the person of him, to whom they are thus applied.

The first of these terms, the Christ, and its equivalent in Hebrew, the Messiah, is not a proper name, as might seem from the manner in which it usually appears in our translation. It is used as a designation of office, and should accordingly have been translated in other places, as in this, Jesus the Christ, instead of Jesus Christ. It signifies "the anointed." It was applied by the prophet Daniel to the future Saviour ; and so applied, as to excite a general expectation in the Jewish nation, about the time of our Saviour, of the appearance of an extraordinary person bearing that title. The passage of the prophet was this ; — "Know therefore, that from the going forth of the commandment &c. to Messiah, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off." \*

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\* Daniel, ix. 25, 26.



This same extraordinary personage had before been designated by the same term, though less clearly, in one of the Psalms, and by the prophet Isaiah. In the first of these cases, the psalmist says,—“Why do the heathen rage, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed;”—his Messiah, his Christ. The prophet, in the other instance, says, personating the future messenger and teacher,—“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me,”—that is, he hath made me his Messiah, his Christ,—“to preach good tidings to the meek.”

But, it is to be observed, that the term itself, though it expressed designation to office, determined nothing respecting the particular office, which the person thus designated was to sustain. That he was to be the anointed of the Lord might intend his appointment either to the regal, the priestly, or the prophetic office; for we find that anointing was the ceremony of induction, uniformly into the two first, and sometimes certainly into the last of these offices. Saul, David, and Solomon received the royal unction, Aaron and his sons the priestly, and Elisha, the successor of Elijah, the prophetic. Accordingly, the “anointed of the Lord,” that is, the Messiah in the Hebrew, the Christ in the Greek, was a common appellation of the Jewish kings and high priests. Thus, when, at the importunity of the people, Samuel had anointed Saul to be their King, he appealed to them for the integrity with which he had managed the affairs of the nation as judge; “Behold here I

am, witness against me before the Lord, and before his *anointed*,”\*—his Messiah, his Christ ; — Saul the newly anointed king. This term is also applied to the ancient patriarchs. Speaking of the covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of the care of heaven over them in their pilgrimage, it is said,—“ He suffered no man to do them wrong ; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, touch not mine *anointed*, and do my prophets no harm.”

But it is quite manifest, that when this language was used in the prophetic writings to point out that future great deliverer, to whom the whole series of prophecy referred, it was then understood to be used in a higher sense, and in a peculiar manner. It was understood to mean, not a literal anointing, as a mere ceremony of induction into the office to which he was appointed ; but an endowment with supernatural gifts and powers, by the spirit of God, to qualify him for it. It was meant to be so understood by our Saviour himself, when in the Synagogue at Nazareth, he turned the attention of his hearers to that passage, to which I have just now referred, in which the Prophet Isaiah speaks of his being “ anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor, deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind ; ” which anointing, he himself tells us, was “ the spirit of the Lord upon him.”

It would seem, that the time of this anointing was that of his baptism, preparatory to entering upon his

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\* 1 Samuel, xii. 3, 5.

ministry ; for then it was, that the spirit of God is represented as descending and resting upon him. Then it was, that Jesus became "the anointed," the Christ, was qualified to enter upon his ministry, and to manifest his divine mission, by the works which he performed in his Father's name.

This was what Peter meant, when he said to Cornelius and the company at Cesarea, that "God had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy spirit and with power." He alluded evidently to the descent of the spirit upon him at his baptism.

It appears, then, that the term Christ, or Messiah, or anointed, is a name of office, derived from the Jewish mode of induction ; applied to the ancient patriarchs, prophets, kings, and priests ; but in an appropriate manner, and as a term of distinction to Jesus, the Saviour ; and to him with reference to that gift of the spirit of God, which he received from the Father at his baptism, when it is said, that "the holy spirit descended upon him, and he was full of the holy spirit."

Several reasons are assigned for the use of the phrase "Son of God ;" his birth, divine mission, resurrection, and subsequent glory. Thus, when his birth, with its preternatural circumstances, was announced beforehand by the angel to Mary, it was added, "therefore shall he be called the Son of God."

In his conversation with the Jews in the tenth chapter of John, Jesus appealed to those works which he did in his Father's name, as the proofs of his divine mission. In doing this, he gave great offence by

speaking of God, as his Father, and of his union with God, in a manner, which they understood to mean a peculiarity of relation, which they considered as a blasphemous claim in any human being. And when on this account they were ready to stone him, he endeavored to remove the wrong impression by showing, that according to the usage of their language, there was no reasonable ground of offence, since even a higher title had been given to former messengers of God, than that which he had claimed. "Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods? If those be called gods, to whom the word of God came, say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?"

He was then the Son of God, as being by him "sanctified and sent into the world." Now he was sanctified and sent into the world, when the spirit descended upon him at his baptism, immediately before entering upon his ministry. Till that time, he appears, from the whole history of the case, to have passed his life as other men, distinguished by nothing supernatural either in his person or his character. And this is agreeable to the testimony of John. For when, at the baptism of Jesus, agreeably to what had before been intimated, he saw the "spirit descend and remain upon him, I saw," said he, "and bare record, that this is the Son of God." In this point of view, then, the phrase, "Son of God," is equivalent to the term "Christ," and they accordingly appear to have been used on many occasions promiscuously, as of the same import.

Jesus is called the Son of God, on account of his Resurrection. By Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, and by John in the Revelation, he was said to be the "first-born from the dead." And by Paul to the Romans, he was "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." And closely connected with this, though distinguishable from it, is, lastly, the glory and power to which he was raised, after his resurrection ; when for his voluntary sufferings and obedience unto death, God highly "exalted him, and gave him a name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father."

Also to the same purpose, that passage in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," is twice quoted by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as applying to that state of dignity and power, to which Christ was raised after he rose from the dead, and was seated at the right hand of God, and was made head over all things to the church. A similar application was also made of this text by the Apostle Paul in his speech at Antioch ; "The promise, which was made to our fathers, God hath fulfilled the same to us, their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." This repetition of this text by the Apostle, in the same application of it, seems to fix decisively the sense in which it is to be understood ; and to show that it has no reference, as has been

sometimes imagined, to a supposed state of glory previous to his life and ministry in this world.

It is upon these several grounds, that our Saviour is declared to be the Son of God. And they show, that he is the Son of God in another and a higher sense, than that, in which the phrase is applied to any other. But a still stronger expression is used. He is called "the only begotten Son of God." This form of words is expressive, still more than the other, of peculiar nearness; but we must not be misled by sounds into the thought, that anything like the *literal* meaning of those words is intended. How far from such literal meaning was the intention of the Evangelist will appear, when we find, that the original word from which it is translated, both in the Hebrew and the Greek, is sometimes used, where the person to whom it is applied is not literally an only son; but only a favorite son, or one peculiarly dear, or one appointed to some great distinction. Thus in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham is said to have offered up his only begotten son, when he led Isaac to the altar. And the same phrase was used also by Moses in giving the history of this transaction in Genesis; "Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac;" though we know, that at this same time Abraham had another, an older son, Ishmael.

Some light is thrown upon this subject, and we perceive a reason for this use of the phrase from the circumstance, that in several instances the same word is rendered "beloved son." From this it appears, that only begotten son, and beloved son, in the minds of

the authors of our translation of the Bible, were phrases of the same import. Nor is it difficult to perceive, how they came thus to be used. An only son is an object of peculiar interest and affection. It was the strongest term that could be used to express endearment and distinguished favor. An only begotten son, then, by an easy and natural transition from a literal to a figurative sense, is used to signify one highly favored, distinguished by peculiar regard, the object of strong affection. In the same manner as another phrase of similar import is applied figuratively to our Saviour; when he is said to be "in the bosom of the Father," that is, to be the object of his affection or trust, and admitted to his secret counsels. When, therefore, the phrase in question is applied, as it is several times to our Saviour, it may have no reference to his nature, or to his derivation. It may have been used in the same figurative sense, in which we see it is sometimes used in application to others; and the circumstances and connexion, in which it is used, favor this interpretation. It is applied by the Evangelist, when speaking of his state of favor with the Father; and of his being sent into the world by him with messages of mercy; and it is used by our Saviour himself, also, in a similar connexion.

There are other expressions used by the sacred writers, to distinguish the person and the character of Jesus Christ, and to point out his relation to God and to man.

Thus, he is declared to be "the image of the invisible God, the brightness of his glory, and the

express image of his person." Now, the Deity is always represented as a pure unembodied spirit, invisible to mortals, the object of none of our senses. On the other hand, Jesus, the Son of God, "appeared in fashion as a man." But, as a man, with all the attributes of a man, in what sense could he bear the image of God? The Evangelist John has enabled us to answer that question, when he said, "No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." It is then by his instructions, not by the exhibition of his person, that he enables us to see "him who is invisible." He is the image of God, inasmuch as he presents his image to our view. He was thus to man the visible representative of him who is invisible; as he was the appointed medium of the most important blessings, especially of divine instruction.

Again; by the application of a prophecy of Isaiah, he was, at his birth, called Immanuel, a name which signifies "God with us." This name was given him, after the Jewish manner of bestowing significant names on persons and objects. This observation, that it was in correspondence with the Jewish custom, may be verified by numerous examples of a similar kind. Thus Moses called the altar which he built, after his triumph over Amalek, "The Lord my banner." The prophet Jeremiah gives to Jerusalem the name of "The Lord our righteousness." And Ezekiel, to express the divine presence and care of the city in the latter days, when the nation, so many ages



dispersed over the earth, shall be restored to their land, calls it, "The Lord is there." Several names of persons also in the Old Testament are at least as remarkable for their connexion with some of the names and attributes of God, as the one in question, which is applied by the Evangelist to Jesus. Thus the meaning of the name Elijah is "God the Lord." Eli, who was a judge of Israel and the patron of the prophet Samuel, is "my God." Eliab, one of the brothers of David, is "God my Father." Abiel, the grand-father of Saul, is "my God the Father." This is enough to show us, that some caution is requisite, as to the inferences we draw from the mere use of significant names. The very name in question, Immanuel, God with us, was given to the child, which was to be born in the time of Ahaz, significant of the deliverance, of which its birth was to be the pledge. When the same name was applied to Jesus, it was with reference to a greater deliverance, of which he was not merely the pledge, but the actual agent. And it was manifestly given him with reference to the authority and power he was to receive, as the Messenger of the Father.

If now it be asked, what is to be understood, by the "fulness of the godhead" in Christ; whether it implies that he was, in any proper sense God, that is, by possessing divine attributes, as his own independent property, the proper answer is found in the words of the same apostle; "It pleased the Father, that in him, all fulness should dwell." This fulness of the Deity then, by which he was Immanuel, God

with us, was the gift of the Father. And the interpretation which this suggests is further confirmed by the words of Jesus himself. "The Father who dwelleth in me, he doth the works." It carries back our minds, then, to the explanation, which has been given of the terms "Christ, and Son of God;" confirming and illustrating what was shown of their meaning, and presenting language in a different form, but evidently of a similar import.

This fulness of the Deity, or the Father dwelling in him, by which he performed his mighty works, and delivered with authority his heavenly doctrine, constituted that "Form of God," which is also said to have belonged to him. He was in the form of God, in the same sense in which he was Immanuel. God spake by him, acted by him, revealed himself by him. Invisible himself, he employed him, as his visible representative, to reflect his image, to speak in his name, to act by his authority, to possess the fulness of his spirit, and to be to men the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.

But still higher distinction awaited him, when he should have fulfilled the purposes, for which he was thus made the messenger, agent, and visible representative of God. As the reward of his voluntary humility, and labors, and sufferings, he was afterward raised by the Father to a higher dignity and glory. "Wherefore God also hath high'y exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on the earth, and things

under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father." The homage, therefore, which he is to receive from the whole creation is by appointment of the Father ; and the ultimate object of his being acknowledged as Lord, is the glory of " God the Father."

Other remarkable forms of expression become intelligible by modes of interpretation, such as are applied in similar cases. " I and my Father are one." In what sense the term one is here used we may learn from the connexion in which it stands, and from the design of the discourse. Jesus was speaking of the security of his disciples. He assigns the reason, why " none should be able to pluck them out of his hands." " The Father," said he, " who gave them to me is greater than all ; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." " I and the Father are one." It is the same thing, therefore, as respects their safety, as if they were immediately in the hands, and under the protection of the Father himself. And if any doubt remained, whether anything more was intended by the expression, than unity of purpose, design, and operation, it would be entirely removed by attending to the manner in which the same form of expression is used on another occasion, when addressing his heavenly Father in behalf of his disciples, and of those who were afterward, through their ministry to become his disciples, he says ; " that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. And," he

adds, "the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know, that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

It is undoubtedly in the language made use of by Christ and his apostles, in its plain and obvious meaning, that we are to learn in what manner it becomes us to think and to speak of him, whom we acknowledge as our Lord and Master;—of his nature, his character, his offices, and his relation to God and to man.

"He was a man," said Peter, "approved of God, by wonders and miracles, which God did by him." He speaks of God as his Father; prays to him, as a Being upon whom he depends; speaks of being sent into the world by him, in the same manner as he himself sent his disciples; of doing always, not his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him; of receiving and communicating his commands; and that his Father is greater than he.

Is all power in heaven and upon earth in his hands? he declares it given to him of the Father. Is he the Judge of the world? it is because the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son. And this judgment is declared to be committed to him, because he is Son of man. He is constituted the judge of men, because he possesses the same nature, as those, whom he is appointed to judge. A similar reason is on another occasion assigned for the office to which he was appointed. "It behoved him," says

the apostle to the Hebrews, "to be made like unto his brethren." Why? "that he might be a compassionate and faithful high priest;" "that having suffered trial himself, he might be able to succor those who are tried." For without partaking of the same nature, and being subjected to the same trials, he could not have been touched with the feeling of our infirmities, could not have had the sympathy which was necessary to make him a compassionate high priest, and a merciful judge. "It suited the ends," as has been well said, "of divine wisdom, that the judge as well as the saviour of men should himself be man. Are divine honors to be paid to the Son of God? it is because the Father hath commanded, that all men honor the Son, even as they honor the Father."

In the subject of this discourse, and the inquiries into which it leads, it is hardly possible for a reflecting mind not to feel a lively interest. One sincerely desirous of knowing what is his duty, must desire earnestly to know. What are we to think, and how are we to speak on this subject, so as not, on the one hand, to withhold from the Saviour the honors which are due to him, nor, on the other hand, to give to him the honor and the prerogatives which belong to God only? Against each of these extremes we ought undoubtedly to be equally on our guard.

Now, to think of the Author of our religion as we ought, is certainly to think of him precisely as he is represented by the Evangelists and Apostles. It is to ground our faith and model our opinions upon the plain and intelligible language of the sacred writers;

and to give him the honor that is due to him, is to give him that which the Scriptures clearly teach.

Of the obligations, that we owe to the Saviour, the serious and devout Christian will think that he can hardly entertain too exalted a sense. Of his nature and his person it certainly becomes him to think and to speak with a cautious reserve, and only as the sacred writers have clearly taught; to say neither more nor less, than they have distinctly said; and especially to avoid the use of language to express his ideas, which Christ and his apostles seem to have carefully avoided.

The Scriptures, which should be our guide, speak of the Son of God, and of the holy spirit of God; but they never speak of God the Son, or of God the holy spirit. In proclaiming also the blessings conferred upon us by the ministry of Christ, they speak of his having reconciled men to God; but never that he reconciled God to men. Men are alienated from God and enemies to him by wicked works; but we are never told, that God is alienated from men, or has become their enemy. On the contrary, the greatest manifestation of his love, and favor, and kindness to men, was that of sending his Son into the world, as the messenger of his love, "to reconcile the world to himself," and this he did, while they were yet sinners, and "enemies to him by their wicked works."

In speaking, then, of him, by whose name we are called, let us be contented to use the language, which Peter used, and which was approved by Jesus him-

self,—“the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And let us use ourselves to speak rather of the titles by which he is called, of his character, of his actions, and of the relations he sustains, of his example and of the purposes of his mission, about which we know something, than to speculate upon those high questions respecting his nature, about which we can know nothing.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE ORIGINAL STATE OF MAN.

No questions are adapted to excite a deeper interest, at least none have a higher claim upon the reflecting mind, than those, which relate to human nature and the human condition. On these great and interesting questions, what does our religion, or rather what do the books containing our religion, teach us? What do they say of man's primitive state, and his condition as he came from the hands of the Creator? and what of the early changes which took place from the loss of original innocence and happiness, and of the train of consequences which followed to the first parents of the race, and to their descendants in all succeeding time?

As to the primitive condition of man, that it was that of innocence and purity, there can be no doubt; and as little can there be, that it is not such now. The wickedness of the world has in all ages and nations been the subject of mournful experience. Neither its prevalence, nor its deplorable effects, can be called in question. But how, under the government of an almighty, wise, and benevolent Being, it was first introduced, when it commenced its fatal reign, and why it was permitted to mar the beauty and impair the happiness and the perfection of his



creation ; these are questions upon which, in all ages, the inquisitive have been involved in perplexity and doubt, and the wisest have found themselves bewildered, and unable to arrive at satisfactory conclusions.

Of the original state of man, the Scripture account is extremely brief. All that is important in it to our present purpose is contained in the few words, "God created man in his own image." Different opinions have been held, as to what is meant by the image of God, in which man was created.

There have been those, who understand by this phrase literally a resemblance in corporeal shape ; and upon this interpretation has been erected a system of anthropomorphism. Others, without falling into the absurdities, which seem to be inseparable from such a scheme, have yet supposed that this language was used, as almost all the language of the Old Testament in speaking of the Deity is, in accommodation to the imperfect and gross conceptions of a people, who were incapable of more elevated and spiritual views. They could conceive of the Deity, and had language to speak of him, only in images borrowed from the human figure and human faculties ; and those they applied to him, which are the most noble, which distinguish man from the other creatures, which raise him above them, and give him power and dominion over them. In these he was supposed to resemble his Creator ; doubtless literally by the mass of mankind, perhaps by the more intelligent and learned, only in some figurative sense. Thus, as in speaking of the eye of God, they

meant his knowledge of all things, by his arm, his power, by his hand, the exertion of his power in action, by his voice and his word, the communication of his will and purposes ; so by his image in man was meant not a literal, but a figurative, not a corporeal, but a spiritual resemblance ; that man was created in that form and with those faculties, by which he bears some likeness to his Maker, in power, in knowledge, and in disposition ; which form and faculties, for want of other means of expressing our ideas, we attribute to God.

Some, however, without falling into the gross error first mentioned, yet think that something more is intended, than is allowed by the last.

The image of God is understood by them to have consisted not in form and faculties only, but in the actual possession of knowledge, and of righteousness, and true holiness ; not that man was created with powers and faculties for acquiring knowledge, righteousness, and holiness ; but that they were created with him, were wrought into his nature, and belonged to it, as a natural faculty, or an instinct.

Those who hold this opinion, represent man, in his primitive state of innocence, as possessing not only a clear understanding, but a vast extent of knowledge ; his mind entirely free from error, his heart inclined wholly to that which is good, his affections directed only to their proper objects, and this whole state the free gift of the Creator ; not acquired, but bestowed upon him ; his original make.

Those who adopt this opinion have probably been

led to it, not so much by the language used by the sacred writers, as by the thought, that it exhibits in stronger contrast the primeval state of man in innocence and the favor of God, with the condition into which he was brought by their loss ; and because it gives a higher representation of the value and importance of the recovery from this loss.


The objections to which it is liable are, in the first place, the want of sufficient ground for such an opinion in the language of the sacred writers ; such a doctrine being nowhere distinctly expressed or clearly implied ; and in the next place, that knowledge must, from its nature, be an acquisition and not an innate property ; and that righteousness and holiness must be the result of certain exercises of the will and the affections, and could have no positive existence till those exercises had taken place.

There is nothing in the narration of facts, which took place while man continued in the state of innocence, to give any countenance to such an opinion ; nothing to indicate uncommon clearness or strength of mind, profound knowledge, or high perfection in holiness. And were it otherwise, should we be authorized to draw conclusions, so obviously inconsistent with the nature of things, from an account so brief as that in the Mosaic history of the creation ; an account in which there is certainly so much of figurative and scenical representation ; and in which it is certainly not easy, sometimes, to distinguish the figurative from the literal, so as to say confidently where this ends and that begins?

But whatever account is to be given of the early records, there seems to be little foundation from those records themselves, however understood, for attributing extraordinary degrees of understanding or of knowledge to man in his primitive state ; and not more have we for the supposition of great perfection of virtue, and strength of the virtuous principle ; for, if he were perfect in holiness, how shall we account for his yielding so easily to the first temptation to sin ? The same historian, from whose account is drawn all that we know, or can know, of his primitive character and state, has recorded also the circumstances of his fall from it ; and certainly they are not such, as to give the impression of high perfection, moral or intellectual, of him who, as far as appears, resisted not a single temptation, nor overcame in a single trial.

We read of the faith and the righteousness of Noah, Abraham, Lot, and other patriarchs under severe and complicated trials, and the firmness with which they resisted and overcame temptations, though in a degenerate state, in the midst of a corrupt and ensnaring world, and surrounded by examples of vice and depravity. But the progenitor of our race became a victim, as far as we know, to the very first temptation by which he was assailed. This facility of yielding to temptation is surely not favorable to the opinion of a high degree of either intellectual or moral perfection, distinguishing him from his descendants.

We shall come nearer, I apprehend, to the truth, if we suppose, that not the intellectual and moral state itself, but the faculties, in the exercise of which



that state was to be produced, were intended to be expressed by the image and likeness of his Creator, in which man was made. And this opinion is confirmed by a consideration of that dominion over the animal creation, to which he was appointed, in immediate connexion with the declaration in question. For what is it that gives to man the preëminence and dominion over the lower orders of creatures? What but the possession of faculties, and the exercise of powers, which are denied to them? And in what else does man so nearly resemble Him, whose dominion is over all, as in those faculties, which fit him for intellectual and moral improvement, and which thus qualify him for the rule over the rest of the animate and inanimate creation?

These faculties, however, we may reasonably suppose, were different in some respects, as they existed in the first man, from what they are in his descendants. In him the faculties of the mind, like the organs of the body, probably existed at first in their full maturity, only requiring to be strengthened by exercise, and perfected by experience. Whereas we, his descendants, come into being in a state of infancy, with our faculties feeble and immature, to be gradually developed, and raised, not by their exercise only, but by their actual growth, to the perfection of which they are capable. In him, as in us, a state of actual knowledge and positive holiness was to be not an original condition, but an attainment; not a gift, but an acquisition. It was to be the consequence of a right use of those faculties, which had been

implanted in his nature, not a bestowment independent of such use.

There was probably, however, another circumstance, by which the first man was distinguished, and must have been distinguished, from all his descendants. However mature and in full perfection his faculties were, he could not have been left to their direction alone, to the mere unaided guidance of his own reason. Wanting those instincts by which other animals are guided, he must have perished before he could have learned the use of his own faculties, or in what manner to apply the objects about him to the purposes of his subsistence or safety, so as to supply his most ordinary wants. We have accordingly sufficient intimations, that the necessary instructions and requisite aid were given him by the great Creator. He was not left to wander at random, and seek a precarious subsistence, and learn unaided what things would be useful to him, and how to provide them. He is represented as being placed in a garden provided for him; not left to discover, in the first instance, what was necessary and what was salutary; but taught what was good. Nor was he only instructed as to natural good; he was not neglected as to intellectual and moral good. He was taught from whence he sprung, the origin and the author of his being, the law under which he was placed, the obedience which he owed to his Maker, and the certain consequences annexed to the performance or neglect of his duty. No more was probably made the subject of direct communication, than was necessary to the subsistence,

preservation, and improvement of his physical nature, and to constitute him a moral agent in the simplest form, and accountable for his actions. Acquisitions in knowledge and attainments in virtue were to be the fruit of discipline, and of the use and exercise of the faculties and affections implanted by nature. He was placed in a state of trial suited to the infant state of his being and faculties. Life and death were set before him. By sustaining the trial, to which he was first exposed, the principle of virtue would be strengthened; and by this, together with the improvement and growth of the faculties, by the increase of knowledge, and by new relations constantly forming, that were connected with new duties, he would become competent to other, more extended and complicated trials; and the principle applied to the first would be extended to every succeeding trial. The temptations and dangers would accordingly be constantly multiplying, on the one hand; while, on the other hand, their individual power, and perhaps even their aggregate power, would be constantly diminishing, by the constantly increasing strength of the virtuous principle.

The reverse must be the effect of failure,—the power of resistance weakened by the neglect to use it. By yielding to the first temptation, he finds himself less competent to each succeeding trial. And as the trials are multiplied, not only the aggregate power of the whole, but the individual power of each is increased; and this, not only relatively, the proportion being altered between the temptation and the power

of resistance, by weakening that power ; but also positively, the same proportion being altered, by adding to the strength of those passions and appetites, which constitute the temptation, or without which the temptation could not exist.

However, then, we may understand and interpret the penalty of death annexed to the positive command, we see, by the constitution of nature, a moral death, closely and certainly connected with the first violation of the law of our being, — with the first, and every offence against our moral constitution ;—a moral death, answering to the moral life, which is certainly and closely connected with the first and every conformity with that constitution.

Thus endued with faculties, by which he was distinguished from the other creatures on this earth, and fitted for that dominion over them, which he was appointed to have, and which constituted the image and likeness of God ; placed in a situation, in which every necessary provision was made for his comfort and well being, for the exercise and improvement of his faculties, and his gradual advancement in intellectual and moral attainments ; and instructed as far as was necessary in the infancy of his existence, before he had learnt by exercise and experience the use of his natural powers ; his condition was that of innocence, purity, and happiness ; but it was also a state of trial ; and the terms and conditions of his probation imply quite clearly, that his continuance in this happy state, or his loss of it, depended upon himself. The threatening of death as a penalty of disobedience was the



pledge and assurance of at least the continuance of life, and his present privileges, so long as he should continue to maintain his innocence, and obey the law under which he was placed.

In what manner the trial was actually sustained, we have a brief, but sufficiently humiliating and deplorable account.

Man being in honor abode not. Created in innocence, and formed for virtue, and for high degrees of perfection, he lost his innocence by transgression, incurred the guilt of disobedience, and subjected himself to its penalty.

What was that penalty, and how was it executed, how was his subsequent condition affected, in what circumstances do his descendants come into being, how are the effects of sin to be counteracted, and the forfeited favor of heaven recovered, and man restored, wholly or in any degree, to the privileges and the hopes, which were lost or impaired by the loss of innocence? These are questions of high import and of universal interest, and will call for our attention.

## CHAPTER XVI.

EFFECTS OF THE FALL. CONSEQUENCES ON HUMAN  
CONDITION.

THE account of the primitive state of man in the Old Testament, and of the change in his condition, which took place when he ceased to retain the character of innocence and obedience, we have seen, is very brief; and the allusions to it in the New Testament are less frequent and less formal and distinct than we should have expected, upon the supposition of the truth of the doctrines, relative to the influence of the first transgression upon all the succeeding generations of mankind, which have been usually held by Christians. It is remarkable that in the Old Testament, excepting the direct account of the transaction in the first of Genesis, we find no certain, or even probable allusion to the influence of the first transgression upon the condition or the character of the whole race.

There are several instances in which we read, as we daily witness in the common course of providence, of the sins of one generation visited in punishment or suffering upon the next; but with no direct or visible reference to the particular consequences or influence of the first transgression. Such is the visiting of the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, in the second Command of the Decalogue, and such the

mournful complaint put into the mouth of the Jewish exiles by the prophet Jeremiah ; “Our fathers have sinned and are not, and we have borne their iniquities.” In neither of these cases have we any reference to a curse, either judicial or taking effect in the natural course of things, entailed upon all the descendants of the first transgressor. The first relates immediately to the great crime of apostasy from the true God and his worship, and threatens punishment to the idolaters, which shall extend in its effects to three or four generations of their posterity. The other, to the single case of the captives in Babylon, suffering in a long protracted exile the evils which their fathers had brought upon the nation by their idolatry, rebellion, and corruption of manners.

Other texts which have been supposed to refer to it are as little to the purpose, and as clearly were intended to express something else. Thus we must look for the meaning of the text in Job, — “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean,” — in the subject of the discourse in which it is introduced ; and that is the brevity of human life, and the sufferings incident to it, — “Man is of few days and full of trouble.” As this is characteristic of the human condition, it is vain for any individual of the race to expect exemption ; “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ?” Who can hope to be free from the imperfections or evils, which make a part of the nature of the race to which he belongs ? So, also, in the appeal of Eliphaz to Job, — “What is man, that he should be clean, and he that is born of a woman,

that he should be righteous," — the reference is in the same manner to the *nature* of man. No individual may hope for a degree of perfection, which does not belong to the race of beings, of which he is one.

Nor is this all. There is a great deal that seems to be inconsistent with any such influence of the first transgression upon the moral condition of all the descendants of the human race. I would instance only to this purpose the reasoning and illustrations of the prophet Ezekiel,\* to repel the charge against the divine government by the Jewish people in their calamities, which was implied in the use they made of the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens' teeth are set on edge." The whole reasoning of the prophet is to show, that in the instance in question, and by a parity of reasoning in all instances, the proverb is without foundation, as applied to the conduct of providence in appointing the condition of men.

The New Testament contains two, and as far as I know, only two passages, which are usually understood as expressing with any degree of directness the influence and effects of the first sin upon the human race universally. The first is in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The other is in the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, verses 21, 22. In each case, the apostle evidently refers to the account in Genesis, and his reasoning is drawn from that account.

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\* Ch. xviii. xxxiii.

But it is to be remarked, that in the last passage nothing more is expressed than the connexion of *death* with the first man, and its transmission through him to all his descendants. And nothing else is proved but the universal mortality of our race. There is no intimation of its being a punishment, nothing to connect it with sin. It may be, for anything that appears, either an original part of the human constitution, or a state of things afterward introduced.

The passage in Romans, therefore, is the only one, which connects mortality with the sin of our first parents, and refers directly to the consequences of the first act of disobedience, as they are stated in the account given in the third chapter of Genesis.

From that account, and this passage in the Epistle to the Romans taken together, we learn that the consequence of sin was death, and all the evils and sufferings connected with it, and incident to a mortal state; that these consequences fell as a punishment upon the first transgressor personally; and that all, who descend from him, are, in consequence of that event, brought into being under a dispensation, of which death, and the sufferings incident to a mortal state, make a part.

It seems to be implied in this statement, that had innocence been preserved, death would not have taken place; man would not have been subject to mortality. The whole condition of man, therefore, and the state of his trial is different from what it was to the first man in his original state, and different from what it would have been, had he retained his first

estate, pure and obedient to the law, under which he was placed.

This view of the case is by some considered as liable to great objection. It is thought that an account so brief, and so figurative, is not a sufficient support for a doctrine of so great importance; that the actual state and circumstances of human trial have, besides, all the appearance of being the original constitution, and not a state of severer discipline inflicted as a punishment for having failed to sustain an easier trial.

But I think that these objections will be thought of less force, than they seem at first to possess, if the subject be viewed in its true light. For, admitting all that can be alleged of the brevity of the account, of the symbolical language in which it is expressed, and its dramatic form; the images are certainly intended to mean something; and it is the general meaning only, as expressed in the statement, to which the objection is made.

Now, the general meaning is only this; that, in consequence of the event referred to, the entrance of sin into the world, the condition of the race of mankind is changed. Mortality and all its attendants make a part of it; and thus the state of trial and discipline, to which man is subjected, is different from what it would have been but for that event. Now, to remove whatever objection may be supposed to lie against this, it may be observed, in the first place, that the main fact, upon which the objection is grounded, will remain the same upon any supposition. All men

do come into being in a mortal state ; subject to the evils and disadvantages, physical and moral, of a mortal state ; liable to sufferings and trials independent of anything they have personally done, and before it was in their power to have done anything to deserve, or to bring upon themselves such evils. Why is such a state of things, introduced in consequence of a great moral change, more inconsistent with a wise and righteous government, than if the same state of things were a part of the original constitution ? In this, no more than in the other case, is it to be regarded as, in any proper sense, a punishment, except to the first transgressor himself ; but, as making part of a system of moral discipline, introduced for reasons, of the whole of which we may be incompetent to judge, but of some which a satisfactory account may be given.

But in the next place, and in connexion with this, the objection meets with a fair and full solution in the analogy between this and the whole system of the divine moral government ; at least so far as respects its making a part of the Christian doctrine. Whatever objections may be supposed to lie against it, they are not peculiar to it as a part of the Christian faith. It is not a condition which Christianity has brought us into ; it is not a state in which it has placed us ; it is not a doctrine which it first taught us. It is a state in which it found us, and a doctrine in which it coincides with the notices of our reason and experience.

We see every day, and in a thousand forms, the

operation of such a general law of our being. Nothing is of more constant occurrence and daily observation. Not only are sufferings brought upon the children, by the faults and neglects of their parents, but such is the mutual dependence and mutual influence, that run through all the social relations, that the condition of thousands, not unfrequently, is essentially affected by the conduct of one, over whose actions they have no control, and in whose virtue or vice they have no share.

To vindicate from the charge of injustice a system, which has this operation, to our entire satisfaction, so that no difficulty shall remain, may not be in our power; for who can fully comprehend the ways of God? Yet, it may be first observed, that something of this is unavoidable in an extensive and complicated scheme of things, in which events are brought about, not in an unconnected manner, but in the operation of general laws, and in a regular series of causes and effects. It could only have been avoided by such a constant interposition to prevent the effects of general laws, as would have rendered the whole course of events uncertain, and general laws in a manner useless. It is then a necessary circumstance attending a scheme, which we have reason to think more perfect, than it could have been had this circumstance been excluded or corrected.

But its necessity, as a part of such a scheme, is not the only consideration which can be urged in vindication of its admission. It constitutes a part of a system of moral discipline intended to exalt and



perfect the character of human beings, and to fit them for a higher state. This effect it has by bringing into exercise in an eminent degree the best affections of the heart, and calling into operation powerful and generous motives, or giving them new force and peculiar efficiency. It is easy to see, and we are fully able to comprehend, how it appeals to one's generous feelings, how it calls forth his best affections, and thus becomes a powerful means of moral discipline, to know that his actions affect not himself only ; that his children, that unborn posterity, that indeed thousands, who are as little connected with his person as concerned in his actions, must yet feel their effects.

It is impossible for us to say, that purposes of moral discipline are not accomplished by such a scheme, which could not be accomplished by any other.

In the last place, the sufferings and inconveniences in question are temporary ; and the uniform language of the Scriptures is, that the final condition of all will depend, not on any act of their common parent, or of any other, but wholly on their own personal character, viewed in connexion with their situation and privileges, and considered as the result of their improvement or abuse of them.

On the foundation of these three considerations, which are supported by the general import and uniform language of Scripture, it is believed, that the conduct of providence may be vindicated, in that system of things, by which the consequences of men's

actions fall upon others; and their condition, and their moral trial are materially affected by the wisdom or folly, the care or neglect, the virtues or the vices of their ancestors, and even those of remote generations.

But, if this account be unsatisfactory to any, let it be further remarked, that the remaining objection lies, not against the scheme of revelation, but against the constitution of nature itself. For the fact, to all the purposes of an objection, can be no more denied by the deist or atheist, than by the Christian.

In a view of that part of the divine scheme, which has been under consideration, it should excite our satisfaction and thankfulness, that it has a counterpart. The constitution of nature is such, that we enjoy advantages, as well as suffer evils from the conduct of others. Our condition may be improved by the care, as well as rendered unfavorable by the neglect of our ancestors. We are benefitted by the good deeds of former generations through the same general laws, which expose us to suffer by their crimes. In the same way that the neglects of the careless or slothful, and the vices of the wicked are visited in deprivations, disabilities, and positive sufferings on their children, the cares of the pious and provident and their virtues descend in correspondent blessings to their descendants, and make their natural condition more easy, and pleasant, and safe.

The constitution under which we are placed is thus uniform and of a piece; and it is exceedingly impor-

tant, in order to have just views, and not be perplexed with objections which have really no force, that we be used to contemplate it in both its parts.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE CHARACTER OF MAN'S PRESENT PROBATION.

THE origin of evil, natural and moral, has always been a perplexing question of philosophy, and of religion. What account the Bible gives of it I have endeavored to show, from the brief history which Moses has left us of the primitive condition and early events of the world, together with the Apostle Paul's allusion to that account in some of his reasonings. Now, granting all that can be claimed, as to the allegorical or mythological character of that account, and making all reasonable deductions from its literal meaning, it still communicates to us an important meaning and interesting instruction. No other account, I believe, is liable to fewer difficulties, or corresponds better with our actual experience, and with what reason and revelation teach us of the character of the Author of nature.

That suffering should be the punishment of sin, and intended for its correction, by an original appointment of the Deity, is at least as conceivable as any other account of its existence. That a part of the punishment of sin should be an increased degree of difficulty in the state of trial, is also what we see to be a part of the present constitution, and we can conceive it to take place in such a manner, as to

remove the supposed injustice of such a scheme. And that the general constitution, as it respects our moral trial, should be different after the introduction of sin from what it was before, or would have been so long as innocency was preserved and obedience rendered, seems to be unavoidable. It was in the natural course of things, separate from the consideration of any positive appointment, that the descendants of sinners must commence their existence and trial under some moral, as well as natural disadvantages. These, as we have before observed, may have, and as we believe, have in fact, had their compensation. So that it will not follow with certainty from this alone, that their condition of trial on the whole is a more disadvantageous one. The benefit as a discipline of virtue may be a full balance for the greater danger. Besides, I have endeavored to remove all objections drawn from moral considerations, by showing, that the main fact, which is the ground of objection, namely,—that all men are subject to “death and to all the evils of a mortal condition, previous to any personal guilt, and without any act of their own by which they could deserve it,”—will remain, and cannot be denied, upon any supposition. And this will be a fair answer to the objection, until it shall be shown, that some other hypothesis can be assumed, which is more credible, or more consistent with the character of God, as the moral governor of the world.

An objection of another kind has been raised against this statement, as implying, that had man not sinned, death would not have taken place; the

human race would have been immortal here on the earth. 'This, it is alleged, is altogether incredible. Mortality, says the objector, must have made a part of the original plan, when man was placed upon the earth ; since otherwise the place prepared for his residence, must have failed to answer the purpose ; it must soon have been overstocked with inhabitants, and incapable of sustaining the numbers, with which, in a course of ages, it must have been covered.

Now this objection has its foundation in our ignorance and limited faculties ; its whole force depends upon the assumption that we have faculties by which we are capable of knowing what infinite power and infinite wisdom are, and what they are not, capable of accomplishing. We are indeed unable to see in what manner all the generations of men, that have lived upon the earth in six thousand years, could subsist upon it at once. Some great change there must undoubtedly have been, either in the productiveness of the earth, in the mode of subsistence, or in the ratio of increase of the inhabitants of the earth. And who can pronounce either of these to be beyond the power of him, who appointed the present constitution and order ? who can doubt, whether it were possible for the Creator to have provided beforehand for such an event ? Especially can no such doubt be consistently raised by him, who, receiving the Christian doctrine of a resurrection, believes that provision is actually made for all those generations of men being restored again to life. For who will say that this is in itself a more conceivable or a more

credible thing, than the other? If we believe that, according to the present scheme of things, the latter will take place; can we with any reason doubt, on the other supposition, of the possibility of a provision for the other event? But we are not called upon to show even so much as this. We are not obliged to be able to say, in any case, what measures the Deity would have pursued, in order to accomplish his purposes, upon the supposition of a different state of things, from what has actually existed. He has always provided for events as they have taken place. What he would have done, or what he could have done, in any supposed state of things, other than what has actually existed, is an inquiry with which we have no concern; upon which it would be presumptuous to pretend to decide; and concerning which it requires no extraordinary modesty and humility to confess our entire ignorance.

No reasonable objection, I think, can be made, so far as has now been stated, to what our religion teaches of the natural effects and the penal consequences of sin; and of the disadvantageous circumstances of the trial to which the descendants of the first transgressor are, in consequence of it, subjected. And more than this, we seem to have no authority for attributing to the influence of the first transgression upon the moral constitution and condition of our race.

All the phenomena which are presented by our experience and observation, agree well with the representations of the sacred Scriptures, as to the wicked-

ness that prevails in the world, its source and its causes, its early power, its universality, and also as to the manner in which it is to be accounted for. All indicates, what the Scriptures clearly imply and teach, that man, as he proceeds first from the hand of the Creator, (the succeeding generations, not less than the first man,) is innocent and upright, yet feeble and mortal; accountable for his actions, by having a moral nature and being free to obey or to disobey the law of his Maker; but neither sinful nor holy, of neither good nor ill desert, till he has actually used well, or abused, the liberty and power with which he is endued.

He has passions, appetites, and affections, which fit him for the condition of being in which he is placed; all of them suited to the objects about him, to his various relations, and to the sphere of action for which he is intended; all of them necessary to his perfection and happiness, as an inhabitant of this world and for the present life, and without which he would not have been fit for his present mode of being;—at the same time that each of them is equally capable of taking a right or a wrong direction, and of conducting him to virtue and happiness, or to vice and misery. This is true of every passion, every appetite, every affection. Each of them, rightly directed, and kept under due restraint, has a tendency to intellectual and moral perfection, and each, by excess or wrong direction, leads to corruption and degradation. Each of them also, and this is an important circumstance, possesses a degree of strength beyond what was



necessary to answer its own direct purposes; and thus answers the purpose of moral discipline. Besides this, disorder has been introduced, by which there is an increased tendency to further disorder. The just balance of the soul is thus disturbed. The restraining power is weakened, absolutely and relatively, by a variety of causes; by hereditary disorders of the system, by infirmity of the physical constitution, by circumstances of increased temptation, by bad example.

Such is the state of human trial, as it now exists, and this, whether it be regarded as an original appointment, or as a condition superinduced by a failure under an easier trial, in more favorable circumstances; — a state of weakness, but not of absolute helplessness, of temptation, but not without the power of resistance, of danger, but not without the means of escape. It is not a state of actual sinfulness, till we have rendered it such by our own free and voluntary act. No good or ill desert is implied in it; nor can we be the subjects of either, but by our actual conduct.

With this statement and representation, fully agrees the general language of the sacred writers. Guilt and merit, good and ill desert, are uniformly represented as personal and acquired; neither transferred to us from another, nor a part of our nature, but wholly the result of our voluntary exercises. We are not made moral beings, that is, with a moral character either good or bad, — but we become such. In the commands of the Gospel, in its precepts, in its promises, in its warnings, not a syllable is found, that leads to a different view. Everything is personal,

and indicates a personal obligation, personal duty, personal responsibility. In all the exhortations to obedience, fidelity, and a life of holiness, no intimation occurs, that he, who is faithful, obedient, and holy, has any other danger to encounter ; or that he, who fails in his trial, and neglects his duty, has anything but his own personal sins, from which he has to fear at the hand of God ; but that for these he is fully answerable in his individual person ; no excuse being admitted upon the ground of the strength of temptation, or the weakness of the power of resistance ; and no pretence for removing the guilt and the censure from himself to another.

This principle of divine government and human responsibility operates through the whole system, and appears in every part of the dispensations of heaven. In all together, and in each separately, are implied, our imperfect and mortal nature, and our moral accountability to the Author of our being ; that we come from his creating hand feeble, but innocent ; the objects of his complacency and favor, till we lose them by our own voluntary acts ; and incapable of being regarded as guilty in his sight, till we have become so by our own personal disobedience.

We see nothing that is inconsistent with this, nor anything unaccounted for, in the alleged universality of sin, nor in its early prevalence. On the contrary, the facts in these respects are such, as to confirm the opinion of no single, original, and irresistible tendency of nature ; but an equal susceptibility of nature to the worst and the best impressions, and an equal

liability to take at first a right or a wrong direction. Were the character early formed and the dispositions first manifested, those of unmingled depravity, it would indeed show the necessity of something further to account for the fact; and no account, it is admitted, would be more probable, or more satisfactory, than that of a uniform and irresistible tendency of nature. But what we see and experience is far different from this. It is not a scene of uniform depravity, but of mingled good and evil. In the first stages of moral life, as early as there is the power of distinguishing between right and wrong, and therefore as soon as there can be either good or ill desert, instead of that uniformity of character, disposition, and action, which a nature either wholly depraved or wholly inclined to virtue must produce, we meet with all that variety in these respects, which were to be expected, upon that view of our nature, which has now been given. The bad passions, it is true, appear at first, but so also do the kind feelings. Anger is not earlier in its development in children than love; selfishness does not appear sooner than benevolence; revenge than a disposition to forgiveness and reconciliation. This, I am sure, is the experience of every parent. The love of truth is, at least, as often the characteristic of early childhood as a disposition to deceive. If it is sometimes found a difficult task to restrain the bad passions, to form good habits, to prevent a tendency to corruption, and to give a right direction to the taste and the inclinations; is it not also true, that examples occur, in which the native love of truth and rectitude,

the sense of duty and the power of conscience, have triumphed over strong temptations ; and all the inducements that could be presented have been insufficient to corrupt the mind, and to draw it away into a wrong course.

Yet we do not deny that the world is full of wickedness. All have sinned. It is so represented by the sacred writers. History and universal experience come in confirmation of their testimony. All come short of moral perfection, have much to be forgiven and much to be corrected, in order to be regarded with complacency and approbation by the moral Governor of the world. It is the great design of our religion and of all its provisions, to bring about this change in us, and thus to reconcile us to the Author of our being, and qualify us to be the just objects of his complacency.

And this has been thought to furnish another reason for regarding our condition by nature as sinful and helpless in another and more positive sense than has now been represented. But I apprehend not with good reason. Our Saviour, indeed, taught the necessity of all passing through a great moral change designated by the phrase, "born again ;" and this new birth, or regeneration, is mentioned by him, and by his apostles, under several forms of expression of great strength and solemn import ; such as being born of God, born of the spirit, renewed, created anew, becoming new creatures, putting off the old man, and putting on the new. Such strong terms to express the change, required in every one in order to become a

Christian, are thought to imply, that by the natural birth we come into the world actual sinners ; since in order to our becoming Christians, we must be born again. But this may appear, by a just view of the subject, not to be a necessary implication. By our birth into this world we become merely human beings, endued with certain faculties, and capable of certain improvements. This is being "born of the flesh." If our faculties be neglected and our natural powers perverted, we become morally corrupt and sinful ; but if, on the other hand, they be so cultivated and improved, as that we attain to a resemblance of the divine character in holiness, we may be said, without any extravagance of figure, to be born again ; and this is a moral or spiritual birth ; and this birth to holiness, whether it take place before or after any positive corruption of heart were contracted, may with great propriety be termed a being born of the spirit. This term may be applied with equal propriety, whether we pass to that new character and condition to which it introduces us, from a previous state of positive wickedness, or only from one, in which we were equally destitute both of sin and of holiness.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## MEDIATION.

A VARIETY of expression is made use of to show, that Jesus Christ is the medium by which are communicated to us the blessings and hopes, that relate to the forgiveness of sin, the favor of God, and another life. He is, for these purposes, the mediator between God and man; he is represented as redeeming us to God, obtaining eternal redemption for us, and God, as "reconciling us to himself by Jesus Christ."

Passing for the present, all inquiry into the exact import of these, and similar phrases applied to the subject; what appears in general is, that, in some intelligible sense, Jesus Christ is the medium through which we have reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead, and eternal salvation.

In this method of bestowing on men the most important blessings, our heavenly Father has not deviated from his usual manner of communicating good. We perceive an analogy between what the constitution of nature and course of providence present to our daily experience and observation, and what the Gospel teaches of the principles and laws of the divine conduct. We see marks of the same

disposition accomplishing similar purposes by similar provisions, in what is done for the well-being of the life that now is, and in what we are taught concerning that which is to come.

Nor in either case do we see less of wisdom or of kindness ; nor ought we the less readily to acknowledge and adore the hand of our heavenly Father, because the gift is not immediate and direct, but communicated to us through an intermediate agency and instrumentality, which, from the careless and unreflecting, may conceal the real giver. We acknowledge, without hesitation, the hand of the great Creator in our existence, in its continuance, and in the blessings we enjoy, as well those, which we derive from social and domestic relations, as those, which we derive from the condition of life, from surrounding objects, and from the course of events ; but in neither of these do we see his immediate and direct act. He employs a great variety of instruments, means, and subordinate agents. God could undoubtedly support our lives, and preserve or restore a sound and healthful state of our bodily organs, and mental faculties by an immediate act of his power ; but he has not done it ; and instead of this, what a complicated system, and vast connected series of means has he seen fit to make use of ! We are sustained by the productions of the earth. But to the fruitfulness of the earth how many conditions are required ! How many things must contribute ! The rains of heaven, the regular course of the seasons, the influences of the heavenly bodies, must all conspire. And to these

must be joined the coöperation not only of our own exertions, but of the labors of many others.

But when we draw our food from the earth, which God has made fruitful by the rains of heaven and the light and heat of the Sun, do we feel any less our obligations to the great Author and Lord of nature, "whose tender mercies are thus over all his works," than if our sustenance were his immediate gift, or we were originally so constituted, as to render any means unnecessary to the continuance of life, health, and the common blessings of existence?

So also, that Christ is the medium, through whom the blessings pertaining to life and godliness are conferred upon us, while it wholly falls in with the scheme of divine government in the natural world, does in no sense and in no degree impair the obligations of those, on whom they are bestowed, to that God, who is thus reconciling us to himself by Jesus Christ; and by whose appointment it was, that he "became the Author of eternal salvation to all those that obey him." To carry into full effect the great purposes of the Father in his mission and ministry, not only was his own personal ministry employed. He sent forth his disciples to preach the gospel of salvation. He erected a new dispensation of religion. He provided means for extending all the benefits of his mission. He thus established and perfected an institution, which was to last through all ages, and extend over all lands, and be the means of completing the great work of redemption. In the whole of this system of man, the mercy of God appears in all its



lustre. Nor is this view of the subject liable to those objections, which are sometimes thought to present great difficulties.

For example, it can be charged with no tendency to withdraw our regards from God, and to direct our sense of obligation exclusively, or chiefly to him, who was but the messenger of his love, and the medium of its most illustrious manifestation. With whatever force such an objection might be urged against the representation of the doctrine of mediation, as consisting in satisfying the justice of God by suffering its full penalty, and thus turning away the divine wrath from the offender, which was not otherwise to be appeased, or its effects avoided ; it can offer none against that interpretation, which teaches, that the merits and mediation of the Saviour are efficacious, not to produce, but only to express the mercy of the Father ; and to persuade men to accept the offers of reconciliation, and thus become the fit subjects of it.

Nothing is more certain, than that whatever efficacy is attributed to what Christ has done for us, and whatever benefits we derive from it, they are uniformly represented as manifestations of the mercy of God. Did Christ Jesus come into the world to save sinners ? It was because God so loved the world, as to send his only begotten Son into it, that we might live through him. Is he the propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world ? It was by the appointment of the Father, who set forth his Son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation. Is he declared to be "a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and

forgiveness of sins?" It is because God raised him up and exalted him with his own right hand for this very purpose. Is it said, that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us?" It is also at the same time said, that in this thing "God commended his love toward us."

Nor is there a more reasonable ground for objection to this doctrine of our receiving pardon, life, and salvation, through the mediation of Christ, that it destroys the necessity, or even weakens the motives to a holy life. However any peculiar notions of redemption may seem to involve such consequences, it is certain they are consequences to which the Gospel gives no countenance.

As no sentiment could be more dangerous than that of relying on the mercy of God or the merits of the Saviour to the neglect of personal holiness; so no sentiment has been more carefully guarded against in the apostolical writings. "If Christ is made the minister of sin," if any take encouragement from the Christian doctrine "to sin that grace may abound," it is not from any authority derived from the Gospel, but in violation of its most express instructions. It has no where taught us that future salvation is an unconditional grant. It has indeed taught us that "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus;" but who are those, who are in Christ Jesus? They are those, who "walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." While it assures us that we are "saved by grace," it adds the caution, that "we receive not the grace of God in vain." And while

it inculcates the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ, informs us, that "he died for us, that they who live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again." And that we must all accordingly "appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## MEDIATION, REDEMPTION, RECONCILIATION.

OF the language, in which the doctrines of the New Testament, respecting the mediation of Christ are expressed, much is borrowed from the ritual of the Jewish religion ; especially the sacrifices of the law ; and almost all of it is, and is universally allowed to be, figurative. We must not impose upon ourselves by the thought, that because language is figurative it is therefore unintelligible or of uncertain meaning. Figurative language may have as clear and fixed a meaning, as that which is to be understood literally ; it may be used with as much precision, and may be capable of being as clearly defined and understood. But it is always liable to be mistaken and misinterpreted. We may fall into error by mistaking its meaning, and by applying to the figures a sense, which was never in the mind of the author. And in doing so, we may find in the Scriptures opinions and doctrines, to which the sacred writers were themselves strangers. Thus, for example, one of those texts, most frequently quoted, as expressing the obligation we owe to the Saviour, and the grounds of that obligation, is this, that “ we have redemption through his blood.” The agency by which he was the instrument and means of conferring upon us the greatest benefits, is expressed by his “redeeming us

to God," and our "having redemption through his blood," which redemption consists in the "forgiveness of sins." But this explanation of the term "redemption," by a parallel phrase, relates only to the end proposed and effect produced. And we are still to seek for the reasons and the propriety of the application of the term in such a sense. It is not its literal meaning, nor is it one that presents itself very obviously ; and is therefore one that we are apt to overlook, though so distinctly stated. Now, by the "forgiveness of sins," we understand, a deliverance from their natural, or penal consequences. Under the moral government of God, sin is then forgiven, when those consequences, which, by an original constitution, or by a special appointment, should have followed, are prevented from following. It is a question of great import, what are the grounds and reasons upon which this takes place.

In general, in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, forgiveness is connected with Repentance ; and it is accompanied with no intimation, that anything further is required in order to it, but that change of disposition and conduct which repentance implies.

Thus we find the prophet Isaiah declaring the kindness of God in his readiness to forgive the penitent ; "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." \*

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\* Isaiah, lv.

In exact accordance with this we find still more fully and distinctly expressed by Ezekiel, the efficacy of repentance and reformation. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die? If the wicked turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; and walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins, that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him, he hath done that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live." \*

When John the Baptist appeared proclaiming the approach of the kingdom of heaven, it was with the call to repentance, intimating no other requisite as a preparation for it, but that men should repent and bring forth fruit meet for repentance. And it is the object of one of our Saviour's most beautiful and touching parables, to teach the same lesson, the value of repentance and the essential mercy of God; to show the readiness of our Heavenly Father, not only to restore the truly penitent and receive him again to favor, but to meet with joy the first symptoms of a disposition and wish to return to duty. What was taught by the Master, was taught also by the disciples; the connexion of repentance, with forgiveness and the favor of God. "Repent ye, therefore," said Peter, "and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."† And to the same effect, Paul, in

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\* Ezekiel, xxxiii.

† Acts, iii. 29, 20.

declaring the commission he received on his conversion to the Christian faith, —“Unto whom now,” said the voice from heaven, “I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me.”\*

In other instances, and they are numerous, the forgiveness of sin seems to be ascribed solely to the mercy of God. Thus it was proclaimed in a solemn manner to Moses by God himself. “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

“Who,” said the Prophet Micah, “is a God like thee, that pardoneth iniquity? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.” And we find David, oppressed with sorrow, and distressed with the consciousness of guilt, which had incurred signal tokens of the divine displeasure, placing his hope solely in the mercy of God, and making that the only ground of his appeal. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.”

But in these and similar cases, there is no inconsistency with those before mentioned, in which forgiveness is connected with repentance and a change of life. We are not to imagine the mercy of God to

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\* Acts, xxvi. 17, 18.

be exercised with a careless neglect of moral desert in his creatures, in such a manner as to encourage impenitence and guilt, by showing that no distinction is made between penitence and impenitence, between reformation and perseverance in sin. We are indeed assured that the mercy of God will never overlook the purposes of his moral government, nor be administered in a manner inconsistent with his other attributes; and that in all cases, though not distinctly expressed, what is so clearly intimated in the passage connected with the last example that was cited, is to be understood. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." It was then on this ground, that David relied on the mercy of God; not because he thought it a blind undistinguishing affection; but because he was conscious himself of a heart penetrated with grief and remorse, and a spirit broken down under a sense of guilt; and he believed that a spirit thus truly humble and contrite, would not fail of mercy and acceptance.

In other passages these benefits are attributed to another cause. Not the mercy of God, nor the repentance of the sinner, but the death of the Saviour is mentioned as their procuring cause. Christ is said to have "died for our sins; to have died for us while we were yet sinners; to have reconciled us to God by his blood; to have made peace by the blood of the cross; to have tasted death for every man; to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; to have



put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." These expressions have an intelligible meaning, and an important application. It is desirable that their true import be understood, and their consistency perceived with what has been stated of the mercy of God, and of the value and efficacy of repentance.

Some light may be thrown upon the subject by attending to the use of several of the terms which the sacred writers have employed in speaking of the efficacy of the death of Christ, and its connexion with pardon, the acceptance and favor of God, and the salvation of mankind.

Our attention is first directed to the use of the word, *Redemption*. To learn the true import of this term, as applied by the sacred writers to the subject before us, it is not sufficient to know its literal and original sense. We are to trace the use of it, as it has been applied by the sacred writers to other subjects and in other cases. Literally and in the original meaning of the word, *Redemption* is a relief from forfeiture, captivity, slavery, or punishment, by the payment of a price ; which price is called a ransom. Thus, a prisoner is released from captivity and restored to liberty by the kindness of friends, purchasing his deliverance by paying the price at which it was estimated. Or a man has committed an act, by which his life is forfeited, and a price is accepted as an equivalent, and the punishment is remitted. In each of those cases there is a proper *Redemption* ; for there is literally a *Ransom* paid.

Now if this literal sense be that in which the word is applied by the sacred writers to our redemption by Christ, the true doctrine of the New Testament will be that, which will justify the strongest language which has been used on the subject. In this case, the death of the Saviour being a literal price paid as a ransom, it was a real substitute for those, who are thus ransomed; it was the payment of their debt in their stead; satisfaction was made to the demands of the law by an equivalent. And then, as no part of the debt is forgiven, but the whole is paid by the substitute; as justice has relinquished none of its claim, but required full satisfaction; we shall have to reconcile this with all that is said of the compassion and mercy of God, and all that is declared of the forgiveness of sinners, and all the motive and encouragement that is held out to repentance. Such an apparent inconsistency with other important and unquestionable doctrines of the Gospel is a reasonable ground for inquiring carefully whether the literal sense of the words in question, was intended by the writers of the New Testament. That it was not, I think we shall be satisfied by tracing their easy transition from a literal to a metaphorical sense; and especially by noticing their use by the writers of the Old Testament, as applied to other cases.

Now, as the deliverance from slavery, or from captivity or punishment, is the *principal* thing, and the price which is paid as a ransom only a *secondary* consideration, — though originally an essential circumstance to make up the idea of Redemption; — the

term easily came to be used to denote the principal thing alone, where this accessory circumstance was wanting; and any kind of deliverance, by a very common change in the use of language, was called a redemption. We see, accordingly, how it was actually applied in several cases in the Old Testament. The deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage is called a "Redemption;" God is said on this account to be their "Redeemer;" to have "redeemed them from the house of bondage, and out of the hand of Pharaoh."\*

But in what manner was this redemption executed? and what was the ransom paid, as the price of their deliverance? Was anything paid as an equivalent for their services, or as a consideration, for which the Egyptians were to let them go? The sacred historians and prophets have answered this question, in a manner that can leave no doubt. "I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments." "Destroy not thy people, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand." "Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and thy strong hand." The nation of Israel, then, was redeemed, not by a ransom paid to their former oppressors, as the price of their emancipation, but by the mighty power and strong hand of Jehovah, stretched forth in those signs

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\* Exodus, viii. 23; Deuteronomy, vii. 8; 1 Chronicles, xvii. 21; Psalm xxvii. 35.

and wonders in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, by which the Egyptian Monarch was compelled to suffer their departure, by which they were protected and avenged when pursued by their oppressors, and were conducted in safety to the promised land.

The same term is applied also in the same manner to the deliverance of that nation from the Babylonish captivity. It is applied in many instances also to the deliverance of individuals from danger, captivity, slavery, or any great calamity to which they were subjected. The propriety of the term is accordingly sufficiently justified, where something important is *done*, though nothing is *paid*, to procure the deliverance.

This use of the term Redemption, may lead us to some just notions of it as applied in the New Testament to the benefit we receive from Jesus Christ. It renders it probable, that when we are said to have redemption by the blood of Christ, the meaning is, not that his death was a substitute and an equivalent for ours ; not that it was a price paid to the great enemy of man, to whom we were in bondage, as the purchase of our relief from his power ; or a price paid to God to satisfy the demands of his law, and to vindicate his justice. But when Christ by his miracles proved himself a messenger and teacher from God ; when by his instructions and example he delivered us from ignorance and sin, and by bringing men to repentance made them the fit subjects of pardon ; when he revealed a future life of just retribution, and

by his death and resurrection, gave the highest confirmation to the doctrine of a resurrection; he was then our Redeemer, in a similar sense with that in which God was the Redeemer of the Israelites of old, in all the deliverances he wrought for them; and he redeemed us by his blood in the same manner, as they were redeemed by the mighty power, and the strong arm of the God of Israel.

There is another term also, in some instances applied to the Saviour, which has passed in a similar manner to a metaphorical sense, and is familiarly so used by the sacred writers, both of the Old and New Testaments. I mean the term Sacrifice. We read "that Christ appeared once in the end of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." "And after he had offered one sacrifice for sin, he forever sat down on the right hand of God. For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

From these, and similar passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and occasionally occurring in some of the other Epistles, the first impression we receive is that of a proper sacrifice; and these, in connexion with others, in which it is said, that he "suffered for sins, the just for the unjust;" and that he was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," lead to the thought of an expiatory sacrifice, and that the death of Christ was, in a literal sense, an expiation of the sins of mankind. And unless there are strong circumstances to show, that such was not the meaning of the sacred writers, and that the terms fairly

admit of an interpretation, from which this idea is excluded, it ought to be retained, as our permanent opinion.

But there are two considerations, which will probably lead us to doubt at least whether, what is popularly understood by an expiatory sacrifice could have been meant by the sacred writers ; if not to satisfy us that it was not. The first is, that the term, as I before observed, has in the use of the sacred writers passed from its primitive literal meaning, — that of an offering made to God, either for an expiation of sin, an expression of gratitude, or an acknowledgment of dependance, — to express any other act, by which a similar effect is produced, where no proper sacrifice is offered. It is thus applied to prayer and thanksgiving ; “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” It is applied to a holy life ; “that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service.” It is applied to an act of kindness and relief ; “I have received,” says Paul, “the things which ye sent,” being a present for his relief, “a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.” It is applied to a humble and penitent spirit ; “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” Such instances show, that the sacred writers may have used this term in a sense, not implying a literal expiation of sin by sacrifice ; but referring to whatever was done by Christ for our benefit, especially to the labors and mortifications of his life, and the unparalleled scene of suffering, that attended his death.

In the second place, there are circumstances accompanying the use of the phrase in some of the instances, which indicate not obscurely, that such was in fact the sense in which it was employed. Thus, in the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author seems purposely to use the language of sacrifice in reference to Jesus Christ, in such a manner, and in such connexion, as to draw the mind away from a literal interpretation; for immediately after applying it to Christ, he applies it to exercises of piety, and deeds of beneficence. In close connexion with a representation of the sufferings of Christ without "the gate, that he might sanctify the people by his own blood;" he adds, "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. To do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." It is not indeed, without example, for the sacred writers to use words in different senses in as close connexion; but it is unusual, and there is much in the general import of the Epistle and its design, that leads to a different supposition. Much to render it probable, that, like the other language borrowed from the Jewish ritual, which abounds in this Epistle, and appears not unfrequently in the others, it is used to express in a manner intelligible to Jews, to whom it was written, and to illustrate forcibly, ideas not the same, but analogous to those, which they were employed to express in that ritual.

Nor is it in a low and unimportant sense, that we shall, by such a mode of interpretation, understand

the sacrifice of Christ. If in the same sense, in which Christians are called upon to present their bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, Christ did actually present himself to God, devoting himself to accomplish his mission ; if to this end he voluntarily underwent sufferings and dangers, submitted to privations, and sacrificed life itself, that he might confer on men the greatest privileges and blessings ; he was surely a sacrifice in a sense, than which nothing can give a higher claim to our gratitude, love, and obedience. In this case, his whole life of active exertion, his instructions, his example, his miracles, his sufferings and death, and resurrection ; these all made part of that “ offering of himself, by which it is declared he forever perfected them that are sanctified.” All these did indeed contribute, and more powerfully and intelligibly, “ to put away sin,” and sanctify mankind, than any literal sacrifice. Indeed, the design of a literal expiatory sacrifice is, not to put away sin itself, but to avert its consequences ; not to produce holiness and promote moral perfection, but to stand as a substitute for it, to atone for the want of it. This was the design of the heathen sacrifices of an expiatory kind. The blood of victims smoked on the altar, to operate upon God, not upon men ; to turn away the wrath of heaven, not to produce that influence upon men, which should qualify them for forgiveness, and make them the fit subjects of the favor and approbation of heaven. But, wholly different from this, all that is said in the New Testament of the sacrifice of Christ, tends to show, that to render God merciful



and kindly disposed was no part of its design, since it is always spoken of as an effect and expression of the kindness and good will of God ; but that it was to “ put away sin,” destroy its power, and deliver men from their subjection to its dominion, and thus to sanctify and perfect them, to make them holy, and the fit subjects of pardon and the favor of heaven.

Another term of kindred signification and similar use, borrowed from the Jewish ritual, is Atonement. This is a term frequently occurring in the Old Testament, in the account of the sacrifices of the law. It is a term also in more general use than any other in modern theological language, to express the benefits derived from the death of Christ. But it has probably not been generally attended to by readers, that the word is scarcely known in the New Testament. It occurs once only in our translation ;\* and that once it is the translation of a word, which, in every other instance in which it occurs, is rendered “ reconciliation.” And this we have the highest reason to believe was the meaning of the translators, since besides their having so rendered the word in every other instance, we find numerous examples of the use of the word atonement in that sense, in writers of that and the preceding age. Dr. Johnson has mentioned two instances of this use of the word in a writer of the next age preceding that, in which our translation of the Bible was made.

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\* Romans, v. 11.

"He and Aufidus can no more atone,  
Than violentest contrariety."

That is, can no more agree, be reconciled, be at one.  
Again ;

"He seeks to make atonement  
Between the Duke of Gloster and your brothers."

That is, to produce a reconciliation between them, to bring them to agreement.

This view is confirmed by the formation of the word itself. It is a compound word, and in some early English writers the composition of the word is indicated, and thus its meaning pointed out in the manner of writing it, at-one-ment, at-one. Atonement then, expressed the condition of being at one, in a state of agreement, reconciliation ; and to atone was to produce reconciliation, to bring parties to agreement, so that they shall be at-one. Nor is the change of meaning which the word has since undergone, an unusual one, namely, from expressing, as it then did, simply the state of agreement, the fact of reconciliation, to express, as it now does, that by which the agreement is produced, the reconciliation is brought about. This is the modern meaning of the term.

Now, though the word reconciliation,—the reconciliation of God and man, as effected by Christ, by the blood of Christ, the death of Christ,—occurs frequently ; it is never in the sense, in which the term atonement is popularly understood, namely, that of propitiating the Deity, turning away the wrath of God, reconciling God to men, disposing him to be merciful by standing

as a substitute for the death of the offender, and thus satisfying the demands of the law.

It has been often said, and may be shown to the most perfect degree of clearness, that in every instance in which reconciliation is spoken of, it is the reconciliation of men to God, not of God to men, that is intended; the reconciliation of men to God, by being brought to repentance, holiness, and obedience, preparatory for, and as a qualification and condition of, the divine favor and acceptance. The word occurs ten times only in the New Testament, and these are all in four of the Epistles of Paul; in each case in a train of reasoning, in which is not only clearly implied, but expressly asserted, what has now been said of its meaning and application. The first is in the fifth chapter of Romans, tenth verse, where the argument of the Apostle is, "If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Here it is distinctly stated, which of the parties was to be reconciled to the other. It was our reconciliation to God, not his to us. The reconciliation was effected by the death of his Son, and this according to a provision and appointment for which we are indebted solely to the mercy of God. For he had just said, that "God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

What is here so clearly stated, is yet more distinctly stated in the next passage in which it occurs, the fifth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, where the passage is, "All things are of God, who

hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation ; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself ; not imputing their trespasses to them ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us ; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." In this passage, in which the word recurs five times, it is, as in the other, God "reconciling us to himself, reconciling the world to himself by Jesus Christ." And there is here very plainly intimated, what we do not find in the other, and what is of importance, how we are reconciled to God by Christ, or as is elsewhere expressed by the death or blood of Christ. It was by means of that "ministry of reconciliation, or word of reconciliation," which was committed to the apostles ; it was the establishment of that institution of instructions, in the doctrines, duties, and motives of the Gospel, which were to influence the conduct of men, to bring men to repentance, and to renew and sanctify the world. It was to be accomplished fully by the exertions of those ambassadors of Christ, who, sent forth in his name, were in his stead, to beseech men to be reconciled to God. And that this was the manner and these the means, by which God was reconciling the world to himself by Jesus Christ is yet more strongly and decisively expressed in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the word next occurs. Here the text is, "that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby ;" that

is, he effected the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles to God by his cross, by the labors, sufferings, and death to which he submitted, as by these, he destroyed the enmity; what enmity? certainly not that of God; for it was the love of God that projected this scheme of reconciliation and salvation. It was then the enmity of men that was slain. They were reconciled to God by having those sinful passions subdued, which rendered them enemies of his government; that carnal mind which is enmity to God, and not subject to the law of God, renewed and sanctified. And this was effected by the cross of Christ. Certainly not literally. The cross of Christ is only the wood on which he was crucified. It is used metaphorically for the fact of his crucifixion. Nor have we here arrived to the explication of the figure. The death of the Saviour by crucifixion, here expressed metaphorically by his cross, is used, as it not unfrequently is, to express, by the single most remarkable fact, the whole of his religion, the whole institution and influences by which the merciful purposes of heaven in the salvation of men, were to be accomplished.

The last passage in which the word occurs, and not less clearly marked than either of the others, nor more doubtful as to its meaning, is in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians. "And by him, that is, Christ, to reconcile all things unto himself, whether things in earth or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind, by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled, in the

body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblamable, and unreprouable in his sight."

Here, as in the other examples, the reconciliation of which the Gospel speaks is that of men to God; men, who before, were alienated in their minds and enemies; and they were enemies by their wicked works. The very act of their reconciliation was to be, their ceasing to be alienated and enemies, and their being presented holy, unblamable, and unreprouable in his sight, to whom they had before been enemies by wicked works.

## CHAPTER XX.

### REPENTANCE, CONVERSION.

THE thing intended under the Christian institution seems to be, that all those, who are to partake of its final blessings, are to be brought by its influences to that moral state, which shall qualify them for the glories and happiness of the heavenly world. To express this qualification, several different terms are employed by the sacred writers, according to the connexion in which it stands, and the point of view in which it is contemplated. Thus, in the first place, when the moral state, by which a man is qualified for salvation, is spoken of with respect to the principle of action by which his life is governed, it is called Faith; and men are then said to be "saved by faith," and to "believe to everlasting life."

When it is spoken of simply as a character, independent of its origin and its cause, it is called Holiness. We are required to be "holy, as he who hath called us is holy;" are assured, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and this in the largest sense of the term, comprehending all those affections of the heart and practices resulting from them, which constitute a good life, is that Godliness, or likeness of God, which has "promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come."

When it is spoken of in reference to past character of an opposite kind, a past life of irreligion and disobedience, it is called Repentance, and those, who are required to alter their course of life, to change their principles, affections, and practices, are called upon to repent. And if, together with this change of moral character, or even without any direct reference to it, a person be spoken of as forsaking some other system of religion, and adopting the Christian faith, the term Conversion is applied; and accordingly all those, who, having been brought up in heathen idolatry or in the Jewish religion, have afterward embraced Christianity, are said to be converted.

Once more; when the design is to express the change itself, which either repentance or conversion imply, that is, the act of changing from sin to holiness, or from an idolatrous worship to that of the true God, it is called Regeneration; and those, in whom such a change has taken place are said, to be born again, born of the spirit, to be renewed, to have become new creatures.

Keeping in view the general thing intended by all these terms, the question now occurs, are they applicable to Christians universally; at the present day, as at the first preaching of the Gospel; to us, as to the primitive disciples of our Lord? And if they are, how far, and in what sense?

To begin with the term first mentioned, it can hardly be necessary for me to set about a formal proof, that the same Faith in the great and fundamental doctrines of religion must forever be equally



necessary, as a principle of action. Faith can no more be dispensed with at one period, than another, or in one region of the earth, than another. It must be as essential to form the basis of a good life now, as it was, when it was inculcated by our Saviour and his apostles. Whatever value it once had, it must always have.

That Holiness also, or Godliness, which has promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, must be equally indispensable, at whatever period or in whatever region of the earth a man may live. The obligation to follow after righteousness, and to abound in every good work, must at all times and in all places remain the same.

Nor can there be any, who do not stand in need of repentance. Whatever is said of its obligation and necessity, is of unceasing and universal application. No human being arrives to that period, when he becomes capable of making those moral distinctions, which constitute him a moral agent and of so acting with design as to be accountable for his actions, without so neglecting his blessings or perverting his faculties, as to incur blame and to stand in need of repentance. The degrees of guilt thus contracted indeed are various, and equally so are the expressions of penitence in those, who are brought to a sense of it.

The propriety of the application of the other terms, Conversion and Regeneration, to the case of persons educated in the Christian religion, is less obvious. Their case is greatly different from that, of those

persons, to whom the Gospel was first addressed. Born under the light of the Gospel, surrounded from earliest life with the means of Christian knowledge, and habituated to the instructions and the institutions of Christianity, no radical change of faith is requisite. It is impossible for them to experience the whole of that change, which must have taken place at the conversion of those, who from being Jews or Heathen, became Christians; or who, at the present day, having been born and educated in paganism, or in the Jewish or Mahometan faith, have the knowledge of Christianity first presented to their minds, after they have arrived to years of maturity, and have had their opinions and prejudices formed by their early education in total ignorance of the Gospel.

Yet the terms in question are not wholly inapplicable to them. They may be applied, though not in precisely the same sense, in one perhaps scarcely less proper, or less important, to that change of character, which must take place in a person, who, having from his birth enjoyed the light of the Gospel, has lived in allowed and habitual neglect of it, and in habits of irreligion, impiety, and vice. For such a person, to become a Christian, a radical change is to be produced. He must by some means be brought to a sense of his condition, of his guilt, his danger, and his duty; to a hearty dislike of his past conduct, and a resolute alteration of his course of life, and to the relish and pursuit of an opposite course. And whenever this takes place, though little alteration may have been made in the objects of his knowledge or his faith, it is as great a

moral change, as takes place in a conversion to Christianity from the grossest forms of pagan idolatry. And there can be no doubt of the propriety of saying, that the subject of it is converted, regenerated, renewed, born of God, become a new man.

But can it be pretended that all true Christians have become so by undergoing so great a change of character? Is it true of every Christian, that, to a certain period of his life, he was wholly regardless of the principles and duties of religion, and uninfluenced entirely by its motives? I think this will not be pretended. There are probably few, who are not in some degree influenced, feebly, perhaps, and irregularly, yet in some measure and at some times influenced, by religious considerations; by a sense of duty to God and a desire of his approbation. It is probably the general character of good men, that their whole life has been a regular and progressive scene of improvement, intellectual and moral, from their earliest years. No striking change has at any time taken place, on which they can fix as an era, from which to date their Christian life. Religious impressions were among the earliest they received. Religious principles and motives were among the first, that operated to restrain and to guide them. Their operation has not been always the same. It has been occasionally interrupted; it has been less sensible and less effectual at some times, than at others; but it has never been wholly lost. They became what they now are, not by any sudden change from opposite views and a contrary character, but by a gradual

progress, and by the influence of a pious and good education ; by first beginning a good course, and then continually “growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ ;” by strengthening good principles, and diminishing the power of the dangerous passions and affections ; by adding constantly to present attainments, and fortifying themselves against the power of temptation. Their growth to the measure of the stature of Christian perfection has resembled the usual course of things in the productions of the natural world. The kingdom of God has, in such persons, agreeably to the lively representation of our Saviour, “been as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”

As it thus resembles the usual process of nature in its vegetable productions, so does it also the most common phenomena of animal growth, and the progress of the mental faculties to their maturity. It seems to be a law of the moral, as well as of the natural world, that the usual and most certain growth to excellence and perfection is a regular, but a slow and imperceptible progress. The oak which has stood for ages was the growth of a century. The highest attainments in science, were the result, not of sudden and violent efforts, but of early begun, long continued, constant and patient exertion. An understanding highly cultivated is the fruit of a regular course of discipline, steadily pursued for a long time ;

usually commenced at a very early period. A similar law of our nature holds with respect to all that comes under the denomination of moral character, and has relation to our moral nature. The most exalted virtues are, like the highest literary attainments, the fruit of faithful cultivation, and a long course of discipline. And the most perfect character is formed, by gradual advances from strength to strength. The seed is early sown and cultivated with unremitting diligence. The foundation is laid early and deep, and built upon with constant fidelity and zeal. The result is, that religion is not a transient emotion, does not consist in a few acts, that flow from sudden impressions; but is a fixed character, established on permanent principles, consisting of steady habits, and governed by certain rules.

Now to persons, whose characters have been formed in the manner now described, it may be imagined that the terms in question are inapplicable. Can they, it will be asked, with any propriety, be called on to repent and be converted? They are already what repentance and conversion are intended to make men. Can it be that they must be born again? Their character is now precisely that, which the new birth is to produce; precisely that, which belongs to those, who are regenerated, born of God. Are they then already converted? Conversion implies turning from something to something. From what are they converted? To what are they converted? Their whole life has been of one uniform tenor, guided by the same principles, regulated by the same laws, and

influenced by the same motives. Are they regenerated? On what moment shall a man fix, as the era of his birth to holiness, who is unconscious of any radical change in his religious views or his moral state, since he was capable of reflection and moral action? who can recollect no time, when his feelings, dispositions, views, and motives of action differed from what they now are, any further than has arisen from the force of growing habit, and the gradual improvement in virtue?

In applying the terms in question to persons of this description, we must be understood to apply them in a qualified sense. When we number such persons, among those, who are born again, renewed, converted; we are to be understood, not as referring to any single change, the time of which can be assigned, and its manner and circumstances specified. It is sufficient that they are become, though by imperceptible gradations, and by means which cannot be specified, what they once were not. They are born again, inasmuch as besides their natural birth, they have experienced a spiritual birth. By their natural birth they merely became men, rational beings, moral agents, were brought by their Maker into a state of discipline. They have since, in becoming Christians, in becoming holy, in possessing the spirit of the Gospel, received a new principle of life, a principle of spiritual life; and this constitutes them sons of God. By the first birth they were fitted to be inhabitants of this world; they received all that was necessary to a human course of life; by the latter they are qualified

for a heavenly life, to be inhabitants of the future celestial world.

These observations are valuable to guard against two mistakes, of opposite kinds, but each of considerable practical importance.

If it be imagined that conversion and regeneration in the highest sense of those terms, meaning an entire renovation, and total change of views, and principles, and habits, and motives of action, are necessary to every one in order to his becoming a Christian ; good men will in many cases be involved in great perplexity and doubt, as to their real state and prospects. If regeneration and conversion, so understood, be considered as necessary to salvation ; and it be believed, that it must be in all cases such a preceptible and entire change, as he who is the subject of it cannot but be sensible of at the time, and cannot but remember ever after ; it must lead those, whose whole life has been regulated by the faith, the principles, and the motives of religion, to expect that, which in their case can never possibly take place ; and it may fill them with constant concern in being unable to find, what they suppose to be an essential evidence of their being the children of God. But this concern and dismay will be removed, if they can be convinced, that to ascertain whether they are converted, regenerated, in a state of salvation, the true question is, what they now are, not how or when they became what they are ; what are their present views, dispositions, and principles, and motives of action, not whether there has or has not been a past time within their

recollection, when these were of a different and opposite kind.

It is not my intention to call in question, or to intimate a doubt of the reality of sudden and sensible conversions, in many cases. Where a course of irreligion, profligacy and vice has been long pursued, or where amidst the common business, and amusements, and interests of the world, there has been, without any gross immoralities, an entire disregard of religion, and total inattention to it, and insensibility to its obligations; if ever such persons become thoughtful and serious, if ever their sensibility to the motives, and obligations, and hopes of religion, is so awakened as to produce a reformation and raise them to the Christian character, it is most likely to take place in such a manner, as to leave an indelible impression on their minds, of the time and the manner of its taking place, and the causes which produced it. It is indeed impossible for a very wicked man to be reclaimed to virtue, or for a thoughtless man to be roused to attention, without being conscious of the change thus produced; but are we allowed to draw from this a general conclusion, that it is necessary for every man, whatever have been his previous character, to be conscious of a similar change?

There is another error on this subject of an opposite kind against which it may be necessary to guard.

There are those, and they are probably not a few, who regard religion as consisting only of external actions. From constitutional temperament, or from some worldly motives, they are generally blameless in



their external deportment, and inoffensive in their lives. No gross immoralities appear. They are useful members of society. They observe good faith in their social transactions, and in the domestic relations, and perform the external duties of religion. But they do all this from mere worldly motives ; because they find it, or expect it to promote their present interest and welfare. And thus, without any influence of religious considerations, without any regard to the divine authority, and even without any reference to consequences in a future life, they flatter themselves that nothing more is wanting, and have no conception that they can stand in need of any change.

Persons of this description are to be carefully distinguished from those, who have before been described, as being already the subjects of a new and spiritual birth, and belonging to the family of the children of God. Notwithstanding this fair show of external conformity to the laws of Christianity, yet as it proceeds from worldly motives, and not from any principle of religious obedience, they are in reality destitute of religion, and stand in need of being converted, born again. And these terms are really applicable to them in as high a sense, as to the openly vicious and irreligious. They require to have new principles of action, new affections, new views, new hopes.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## HUMAN AGENCY AND DIVINE INFLUENCES.

IN a preceding lecture I gave some account of Repentance, Conversion, and Regeneration. Distinguishable as they are from each other in some respects, there is one important point in which they agree. Each implies a great moral change in him who is the subject of it ; a change, for which an adequate cause must be assigned.

How is the change effected ? What has produced it ? And what is to produce it in those who are called upon to repent and be converted ? Opposite opinions, and incompatible with each other, have been held on this subject, and the Scriptures have been appealed to in support of each. Passages from the Bible are adduced on one side, which are thought to refer this great change of character and state to a human agency ; and on the other side, to a divine influence. It requires a careful examination of the Scriptures, and a faithful application of just rules of interpretation, to ascertain how these representations, apparently incompatible, may be reconciled, or rather to see them to be perfectly consistent with each other. It has too often happened, that a zeal to maintain the divine sovereignty, and to promote humility and a sense of dependence on the one

side, and on the other a jealousy of infringement on human liberty, and a wish to encourage human activity, have led men to attend exclusively to those passages which support and enforce their favorite views; and to pass over and neglect those which seem to oppose them.

But the Scriptures will on this subject, as on all others, be found by him who examines them with due care, perfectly consistent with themselves and with the true philosophy of the human mind.

We find them employing commands and exhortations; proposing rewards and punishments, as motives of action; expostulating with the wicked, and complaining of their obstinacy and perverseness in resisting measures designed to effect their reform. They thus treat men as free and accountable beings, and imply in the strongest manner a power of doing or forbearing, of choosing or refusing, of being excited by motives or resisting their influence. On the other hand, dependance on God and divine assistance are implied in the obligation of prayer; in the duty, so often expressed, of trusting in God and acknowledging him in all our ways; and in the constant representations of Him as the source of all good, moral as well as natural.

In becoming virtuous, as well as in continuing a course of virtue already begun, both human activity and divine assistance are to be acknowledged. This will appear very clearly by comparing together several of the commands and promises of the Scriptures. It will appear that the same things are subjects some-

times of the one and sometimes of the other. It will be found also, that we are commanded to do that ourselves, which we are directed to pray for; and to acknowledge that afterward, as the work of God, which we were previously required to perform as a duty. Examples are numerous and striking. "No man," said our Saviour, "can come unto me except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." That influence by which they were to be drawn was also the subject of a promise. "It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Yet sinners are called upon to "come to Christ" themselves. "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden; take my yoke upon you and learn of me." They are censured for not obeying the call. And their refusal or neglect to come is charged to them as the effect of their own obstinacy. "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

Repentance is represented as the gift of God. "If God, peradventure, will give them repentance, to the acknowledgment of the truth." It is also said to be the gift of Christ. "Him hath God exalted, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins." It is, however, represented as the duty of the sinner, and, when it takes place, is spoken of as the proper act of the penitent. Christ declares, that "he came to call sinners to repentance." And Paul asserts, "that God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

Conversion, — the turning from sin to righteous-

ness, or from a false to a pure worship, is sometimes represented as effected by divine operation; "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned." But it is also required of the sinner to return, as if his doing it or not depended entirely on himself; "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord."

This turning from sin to holiness, when presented under the figure of a new creation, is in the same manner represented as the work of God. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Yet are we earnestly exhorted "to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, — to be transformed by the renewing of the mind, — to put off the old man, which is corrupt, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." All this we are directed to do in the same manner, as if this new creation were to be wholly accomplished by our own independent exertion.

One of the strong figures, under which the great moral change is represented in Scripture, is, that of a resurrection from the dead. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." But this also the sinner is commanded to do himself. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead." In fine, that renewal of the heart, which is so frequently the subject of a divine promise, and sometimes a devout and earnest supplication, — "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes;" — "Create in me,

O God, a clean heart, and renew in me a right spirit ;” — this renewal of the heart, thus attributed to God, as his work, is enjoined on the sinner as his duty ; — “ Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart and a new spirit.”

There is indeed, I believe, no form of expression made use of on this subject, which is not employed, like these which have been adduced, to express both the divine operation and human activity. The natural conclusions from the whole of this view are, in the first place, that whatever difficulties may occur in our philosophical speculations on the subject, man is supposed by the sacred writers to possess some degree of activity in the first, as well as in every subsequent act of virtue ; that even in that great moral change, which takes place in the conversion of a sinner, that very act of turning to God, which is expressed by the strong terms of a new birth, a resurrection from the dead, he is not merely passive, acted upon, and exerting no activity ; but that he has even there some agency, some freedom of choice, some power, at least, that of being influenced or not by motives presented before him. But, in the second place, that neither this change, nor subsequent acts of virtue, are to be attributed to his independent agency alone ; that the power of man to become holy, to be renewed, to be born again, is not such as to preclude the notion of dependence on God, or to render unnecessary divine assistance.

Of what nature this divine assistance is, and in what manner it is communicated, the Scriptures teach

us, if not with sufficient clearness to gratify our curiosity, and to answer all the questions which may be suggested on the subject, yet with sufficient to give us reasonable satisfaction.

It is represented as either mediate, that is, by the instrumentality and use of means adapted to the end, or immediate, by some direct influence on the mind.

Of the former kind are all the various instructions, admonitions, and warnings of the Holy Scriptures. The "word of God" is thus "the incorruptible seed, by which men are born again." In aid of this, as powerful means of communicating knowledge and promoting reformation, are Christian Institutions. A weekly Sabbath, and assemblies for public worship, by calling off the attention from secular cares, and fixing it on the objects and concerns of religion, are means by which a right direction is undoubtedly given to the minds of many; — multitudes are trained up by a regular discipline in habits of piety and holiness, and it is hardly to be questioned that some may be recovered from those of irreligion and vice.

The same purposes are again promoted by numberless incidental circumstances in the condition and in the intercourse of life. Without interrupting the natural course of things, our state may be ordered in such a manner, as to give a certain direction to the mind, and a certain tone to the feelings, and to effect a change in our manner of thinking, or in the nature of our pursuits and our habits. Especially are such effects produced by uncommon or very interesting events. Unusual phenomena of nature will call up

the attention of the thoughtless to the God of nature. In remarkable events of Providence those may be brought to see and acknowledge the hand of the Almighty, who have not discerned it in daily occurrences. The personal calamity which dissolves the strong ties of nature, dissolves with them one of the strongest ties to the world, and is not unfrequently the means of raising an eye to heaven, which before was fixed to earth, and of elevating and purifying those affections, which were absorbed by the cares of the world, and polluted with vice.

Sometimes the same effects are produced by the reproofs of friendship, or by the faithful voice of prophetic warning. The exertions, indeed, of good men, employed in various ways, are among the most ordinary and the most successful means, by which repentance and conversion are effected. Hence the priesthood and prophetic office, under the former dispensation, and the Christian ministry, together with the whole system of written and oral instruction, under the present. And those, who are thus employed, in "converting sinners from the error of their ways, and turning many to righteousness," are represented as the ambassadors of Christ; and whatever they accomplish, it is in his stead, and as instruments in his hands.

Thus it is, that repentance, conversion, regeneration, are the work of God, effected by a variety of means, and the instrumentality of subordinate agents. It is in the same manner as he bestows on us all other blessings. The food by which we are nourished is



his gift, and he has provided the clothes with which we are covered ; not independently of our exertions to supply ourselves with both the one and the other ; nor independently of the labors of other men ; but by employing both. God is also the preserver of our lives, and is to be acknowledged as such in all the common, as well as the uncommon exigences of our being ; — not by immediate acts of power, however, but by the instrumentality of a great variety of means. Of these means, our own exertions and the aid of others constitute an essential and principal part. If they are neglected or withheld, the protecting care of heaven is withheld. We perish. A miracle is not wrought to save him who takes no care to save himself. The falling tower is not suspended in favor of him who carelessly or presumptuously loiters under the impending danger. He is not saved from destruction who disregards the warning voice, that would keep him from exposure to the pestilential vapor. So it is in what relates to our final salvation. God works in us to will and to do ; yet are we to work out our salvation with fear and trembling ; with the same solicitude and the same faithful effort as if all depended upon ourselves.

But in the conversion of a sinner, and in the holy lives of those who are the sons of God by regeneration, the Scriptures are usually considered as teaching us to acknowledge something more than this ; as implying, in the language they use on the subject, some more direct and immediate influence of the divine spirit on the mind, than has yet been intimated.

Now with respect to the possibility of such influence, is there any believer in the first truths of Natural Religion, who can doubt it, or will call it in question? Will any say, that He who formed the human mind cannot have access to it, so as to aid it in the exercise of its powers, or to give a new direction to it?

We are however to recollect, that the possibility of a thing supposed, and its probability or credibility, are quite different things. Innumerable events may be imagined, which we cannot deny to Almighty power, and which we are yet quite sure that infinite wisdom and love will never bring about. We have further therefore to ask, whether there are any considerations, which render it credible, that a power, which we know exists, will be thus exerted.

Any grounds of such credibility, it would seem, must be found in the nature of man or the circumstances of his condition. Are then the imperfections, the infirmities, and the wants of our nature such, especially when compared with the strength of temptation to which we are exposed, as to furnish a reasonable ground of expectation, that such direct influence will be granted to our weakness and our wants? That such influence has no positive incredibility in it, seems to be certain from the fact, that its reality has been the opinion of all ages, and makes a part of all religions. It has always been the subject of the earnest prayers of good men, who, feeling these infirmities and wants, have looked to the Author of their being for aid and support under them. And much of the language of

the Bible is thought, by most readers, to be such as can hardly be understood to mean any thing short of it.

Yet there are several considerations, which have sometimes been urged as objections to any influence of the spirit of God upon the minds of men beyond that which takes place in the ordinary course of things, through the instrumentality of sensible means, and the effects of which are perceptible.

One of these is, the incomprehensible nature of such influence. We are not bound, it is said, to believe what we cannot understand.

But why, it may be asked, should that circumstance respecting a matter of fact, be a reason for doubting the reality of the fact itself? Do we apply the same principle in other cases, and admit the reality of nothing, which we are unable to account for, or to comprehend? Do we deny, even in the operation of our own minds, all that is above or beyond the reach of our comprehension? The only proper question here seems to be, as to the *reality of the fact*; (since there is confessedly no natural impossibility or absurdity in the case;) whether the language of the Scriptures on this subject do require to be so interpreted, as to express the influence in question. This question settled, there seems to be no room for the difficulty itself. For, if we are satisfied that the Scriptures, in their true interpretation, do teach the influence of the spirit in the sense in question; if they teach us to pray for it, teach us to be guided by it; it will then only be a

good reason for calling its reality in question, because we understand not *how* the *effect is produced* on our understandings or our wills, when we are capable of understanding and explaining how, in common cases, they are operated upon by ordinary motives; when we are capable of solving all the phenomena of thought, all the changes of disposition, of purpose, of will.

It is not less conceivable, that He who made us and gave us our faculties, should have access to our hearts, so as to impart an impulse to them, than that we should have, as we constantly experience, access to each other's hearts, so as to turn them by our counsel or warning. And if the thing itself is not inconceivable; is it incredible, that occasions may occur under a providence, usually conducted by general laws, in which such an action upon the mind may be very important, as is not provided for by ordinary means?

Another difficulty often suggested is, that the influence of the spirit is not of such a nature, that he to whom it is imparted can have any sensible evidence of its existence. It is not pretended that he, who is the subject of it, is conscious of it at the time. It is not felt, so as to be distinguishable from other common influences.

'This is indeed a good reason for caution and deliberate examination, so as to admit only what is unequivocally taught, and is seen to be so. And it would present an objection not easily surmounted, if the ordinary operations of the mind were perfectly under-

stood, so that we could explain them distinctly, and account for them entirely. But how far is this from being the case! How very little is there, that we are capable of explaining! How little do we know of the laws by which ideas arise in the mind, and motives influence the will, and produce voluntary action! Do we know enough to be able to say, with any degree of confidence, when those laws have their natural operation, and when they are interrupted or superseded? to distinguish when they are, and when they are not aided, or checked, or controlled, by some influence, of which we have no perception, but of its effects, which we witness?

If, then, we are capable of understanding so little of the natural, unaided, and uninterrupted process of the mind in the use of its faculties; is it incredible, is it at all unlikely, that we should be unconscious at the time, of any additional force or impression communicated to our thoughts or motives of action, or of the source of any extraordinary illumination of the mind, or impulse given to the will?

But there is another question raised on this subject of still more importance. Is the divine influence in question,—that is, an immediate influence of the spirit of God,—consistent with that moral liberty, which is necessary to make men accountable for their actions? For if it be not, it will be conceded on all hands, that it is to be rejected; since the very basis of all religion is, accountableness for our actions, and it is incredible, that in a revelation from God, anything should be taught us as a truth, which destroys

it. But why should its consistency with that liberty, which constitutes accountableness, be doubted? Why should divine assistance, any more than human influence, be supposed to take away our moral liberty?

Undoubtedly it may be such, in kind or in degree, as wholly to destroy our liberty, and make us mere machines, without any proper personal activity, and therefore not accountable; or, on the other hand, it may be such, that liberty may not be even impaired. Can any reason be given, why the suggestions of the divine spirit,—whether it consist in thoughts suggested to the mind, or an impulse given to the will,—must in fact do it, more than the suggestions, the advice, or the expostulations of parents or friends? As the latter, so the former, may exert a powerful influence, and yet leave the mind in perfect liberty. Nothing is more intelligible and plain, than the assertion, that to enlighten, to aid, and to influence do not necessarily mean absolute compulsion, or control, or restraint. We may still be at liberty to follow the advice, or to set it aside, to obey or to resist the impulse, to accept or reject the offered aid. We are surely not to assume, that an influence which is real, must therefore be irresistible; and if it be not irresistible, there is no pretence for the charge of inconsistency with moral accountableness.

This is clearly the case with all the influence which we have over one another. Light is thrown upon our path, but we are not obliged to follow it. We may turn a deaf ear to the wisest counsels; we may refuse to listen to the most tender and friendly

expostulations ; we may persist in rejecting the kindest aid, and perish for the want of it. All this is constantly implied in the whole language of Scripture on this subject. The assistance of the spirit, whatever it be, whether direct or indirect, internal or external, is given "to help our infirmities." It is not to supersede our exertions, nor to render them useless ; still less to bind us by an absolute control. Like all the other gifts of God, this grace also is offered to our acceptance and use ; and our power of profiting by it or not, as we shall choose, makes a part of our moral discipline ; like the power which we have in respect to every other gift of God, and endowment of our nature.

We are exhorted not to receive it in vain. This implies that it may be received in vain. We are warned not to despise, not to quench the spirit. It may then be despised ; and like any other aid which is offered to us, may be rendered ineffectual by our neglect or wilfulness.

It is extremely important to keep in view this circumstance in the representations, which the Scriptures everywhere give of the influences, whether common or extraordinary, by which the great purposes of Christianity are to be effected, in bringing men to holiness and heaven. They are given, not to make us what we ought to be, independent of our concurrence ; but to give us the power of becoming so by such concurrence. They are for our use, but may be abused, or neglected, or perverted by us.

The promises of the Gospel are made, not to those

who have the spirit, but to those, who are led by the spirit, who walk after the spirit, and not after the flesh. This walking after the spirit is our voluntary act, and if we fail to do it, we lose all the benefit of having the gift of the spirit imparted to us.

It seems to be implied in the doctrine which we are considering, that spiritual assistance is granted to some and withheld from others, or to some in higher degree than to others; and the question is asked, whether this is consistent with the character of God, as the common parent, and a righteous governor over the human family. To this difficulty, it may be sufficient to show, that whatever weight it may have, lies with equal force against the whole conduct of providence. For where is there another blessing, that is imparted to all in equal measure? And do we, in respect to all other blessings, regard the divine impartiality as requiring this,—that to all men should be given the same measure of understanding, the same external advantages, the same degrees of temptation, and the same means of resistance? In the infinite variety of appointments which we see, do we not think the Author of all sufficiently vindicated, when we view them as making a part of the great system of moral discipline; not simply as gifts and advantages calling for gratitude; but as means, opportunities and motives to higher exertion, and for the use of which we are accountable?

If the influence in question were absolutely necessary to salvation, and it were yet withheld from some, so that, for the want of it, they were excluded from



the possibility of its attainment, while, on the other hand, those were secured from the possibility of failing, to whom it was imparted, — the objection would indeed be insurmountable. But to remove this objection, it is enough, that from none are those aids withheld, which are necessary to their salvation, and without which, by no exertion of theirs could they have attained to holiness and a new life; and that those also, to whom the largest portion is given, are finally to be accepted, not according to what they received, but according to the use they have made of their gifts; that not those who have had the spirit, but those who have been guided by it; not those who have had the light, the motive, the impulse, but those who have walked in the light, obeyed the impulse, been governed by the motive, will receive the final rewards of the children of God.

There is another consideration which belongs to the subject. It relates to the rule by which the influences of which we are speaking, whatever they may be, are imparted; which, so far as it is seen to operate, must remove all exception. It is, that they are given to those who have made a good use of common advantages, and who, being sensible of their weakness, danger, and further wants, ask aid of Him, who is able to give it. This principle seems to be clearly and distinctly recognised. God gives his holy spirit, as a kind parent gives good things to his children, to them that ask him. The repenting prodigal is met by his father. But it is not till he has resolved to return, and cast himself upon his mercy; and his

blessing is then in answer to humble and earnest supplication. "To him that hath shall be given ;" that is, to him who has made some right improvement of what has already been granted, and thus shows that he values it, and would be likely to make a good use of more.

On the whole ; repentance and newness of life are required of us as our duty. That we may be born again, that we may be transformed by the renewing of the mind, we are called upon to the exertion of our faculties and advantages with the same diligence and zeal, as if our own independent exertion were sufficient for the purpose. But we are to do it in a humble sense of dependence on Him, who gave us our faculties, and appoints the advantages and the trials of our condition. In our weakness we are to ask his assistance ; not to supersede our own endeavors, but to render them effectual. For all our success, we are to acknowledge the favor of heaven. Our failure we are to attribute to our own neglect. Without the former, all exertion must indeed be vain ; but it is the Christian's just and well founded persuasion, that it is never withheld from him, who, in a pious sense of dependence, asks it of Him who is the Father of lights, and manifests a right disposition and purpose by faithfulness in the use of such means as he already possesses.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## FUTURE LIFE.

THE doctrine of a future life is the most important doctrine of the Christian religion. It is usually regarded also as its most distinguishing feature. It is sometimes claimed to be a truth absolutely peculiar to the Christian faith. But when it is asserted by the apostle, that "life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel," it cannot be meant that the doctrine of a future life was first presented to the minds of men by the Gospel. There is too much to contradict such an assertion. It is not that the light of nature gives no hints on the subject. We have seen that its intimations are so many, so clear, and so strong, as to have excited some expectation in all ages. It is not that in previous revelations the doctrine was wholly overlooked. It was known to those who lived under the dispensations that preceded Christianity. It was the faith of the ancient patriarchs. It was the faith which animated and supported pious and good men in the Jewish church. It was the faith which gave them courage to encounter dangers, and fortitude to support trials, and to meet death.

Nor was the hope confined to those who acknowledged a revelation from God. Traces of the doctrine, the remains probably of a primitive revelation, continued for ages with tribes of men, who had lost

the knowledge of the source from which they had received it. And that reason, common to all, which perhaps would never have made the discovery of the doctrine, yet served to furnish them with valuable confirmation of its credibility and truth.

Yet still there is an important truth in the assertion, "Life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel," — to far clearer light than they had been brought by any preceding revelations. The doctrine was taught distinctly, expressly, frequently, with strong impression, in all its practical relations, with variety of illustration ; it entered into and made an essential part of the whole scheme.

1. In treating of this subject, as a doctrine of revelation, two points are to be attended to. In what manner is the doctrine taught ? What is the nature and the amount of the information that is given upon the subject ?

In what manner is the doctrine of a future life taught in our sacred books ? It may be doubted whether it is found anywhere directly taught in the Old Testament. And some have doubted whether it is recognised at all by any of the writers of the Old Testament ; whether it made any part of the religion of the Jewish nation ; whether it was even known to those who lived before the time of Christ. It seems to me that such an opinion is not authorized upon any fair interpretation, that may be put upon many facts in their history, and upon many passages in their sacred books.

Besides the incredibility, that revelation should be

wholly silent, for so many ages, respecting a truth of more importance than any other in its influence upon the conduct of life, and as vindicating the character of God, as the moral governor of the world ; there seem to be strong positive indications running through the history of the Jewish nation and their books and institutions, that this doctrine did make a part of their religious faith. How else can we understand the triumphant faith and cheerful hopes expressed by the ancient saints in trials and sufferings, if they looked for nothing after death ? How shall we interpret the language of pious trust in their sacred songs and devout meditations ? What was meant by the blessedness of the good man in death, and the dreadful end of the prosperous sinner, if both alike went down to dust and forgetfulness, and there was nothing further to be hoped or feared ?

This was clearly not the opinion of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews. In celebrating the faith of the ancient worthies, he certainly regarded the hope of a future life as an important article, and as that which, more than any other, decided their character, and formed the motive that regulated their lives. They found a future life implied in an event recorded of one of their early progenitors. The translation of Enoch was stated to be the reward of his distinguished virtue, and a mark of the peculiar approbation of God. But this could only be upon the supposition, that his removal from the world in the midst of life, was not the termination of his being, but a transition to a nobler and happier condition.

Abraham and the patriarchs also, it is intimated, when at the command of heaven, they left their country to take possession of a distant land, limited not their views to the earthly Canaan, but had their hopes fixed upon a "better country," a heavenly inheritance.

This, also, was "the recompense of reward," which sustained the faith and fidelity of Moses. It could not have been the hope of being the successful leader of his people to the promised land, for that achievement he was not allowed to accomplish. It was the hope of immortality which made it reasonable for him to choose as he did, "to suffer afflictions with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." It was this hope too, and this only, that will account for the steady faith and resolute firmness with which a long succession of worthies submitted to cruel sufferings and death, "not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."

But though I think it sufficiently clear, that the doctrine of a future life was not unknown to the patriarchs and to those who lived under the Mosaic law, yet it is undoubtedly in the New Testament, that we are to look for the clearest and fullest declarations on the subject. Though many of the passages which have usually been regarded as having reference to the subject, have been undoubtedly misapplied, and may be shown to have meant something else; yet there are others, and they are numerous and of great variety, which cannot be so explained as to exclude the doc-

trine. And no man, probably, ever rose from the careful reading of the New Testament, with any doubt on his mind, whether a future life after death, a resurrection, a righteous judgment to be passed upon the characters of men, and rewards and punishments corresponding to that judgment, made a part of the religion which Jesus and his disciples taught.

In the first place, there are forms of expression, occurring incidentally, but frequently and upon different occasions, which only imply a future life, without any further indication ; but which thus, by the manner in which they are introduced, show that the thought was a familiar one, and of constant occurrence ; to be used, as the occasion required, either as a reason for virtuous exertion, or as a topic of consolation. "Because I live," said Jesus to his disciples, "ye shall live also."

There are other forms of expression of not less frequent occurrence, in which a still further idea is expressed. I refer to those which speak of a resurrection. By this the mind is carried forward with certainty to something beyond the present life, — something that is to take place after the event of death. Accordingly when our Saviour says, "I am the resurrection and the life ;" when he declares the blessedness of those who do good in a disinterested manner, and where they can have no hope of any benefit from it in this life, by the assurance that "they will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just ;" and when, speaking of the authority and power committed to him by the Father, he says, "the hour is

coming when all who are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth ; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation ;” there can be no doubt that he has reference, not to anything which is to take place at some future time in the present life, but to that which is to befall men after death, in another, a renewed state of being. And this will be true, whatever be the sense in which we understand the word resurrection ; whether we suppose that term to mean a restoration of the body to life again, or only the renewal of conscious being.

There is further a class of passages, in which this resurrection, renewal of life, or restoration to consciousness and action, is connected with a judgment to be passed upon all those thus restored to a new life ; so that all thus raised to life, and thus judged, shall receive according to their works, according “ to the things done in the body, whether good or bad.” To this judgment we find frequent allusion by our Saviour himself, as well as by his apostles. This he probably meant by the “glory of the Father,” in which he would appear, when he would “reward every man according to his works.” “The glory of the Father,” is preëminently that of a righteous governor and judge.

Accordingly, in the next place, we find passages not less numerous, in which our Saviour presents the hopes and fears of religion in the rewards and punishments of the future life. In his discourses and in his parabolic representations, he usually brings the event



of the resurrection and the scene of the judgment, into close connexion with the actual retributions of eternity, and represents them as preparatory to those retributions. Thus, "when the son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and all nations shall be gathered before him," it is that they may be judged according to their desert, and be separated according to the judgment passed upon them; the one part to be welcomed to the inheritance of the kingdom reserved for them, the other to be sent away to the punishment prepared for them.

In these several ways is the Saviour represented by the evangelists as teaching the doctrine of life and immortality. The leading points are a resurrection, another life then to be entered upon, a righteous judgment, and a consequent retribution. Nor is it only that these several views are once, or a few times, distinctly stated. They are presented separately and together. They are offered as reasons and motives to a holy life; as topics of consolation in mortal trials and sufferings; as grounds of hope and joy in the approach of death. They are employed to deter from sin; to teach the value of the soul; and to show the wisdom of preferring the interests of the soul to those of the body,—the safety of the future, to the enjoyment of the present; the wisdom of laying up treasure in heaven rather than on earth, and of looking mainly at things unseen and eternal.

Thus, besides being alluded to in various modes of thought and forms of speech, beyond those in which they are expressly taught; they are yet farther con-

stantly implied, where there is no actual allusion to them, in instructions, in exhortations, and in reasonings, which borrow their whole force from the doctrine in question, though it is neither expressed in the connexion, nor even remotely alluded to. But unless the doctrine be considered as implied, the whole would be without force or meaning.

I would add, that in every mode of instruction employed by our Saviour, — whether he taught by set discourses, by parables, by familiar conversation, or by miracles, — the doctrine of immortality made a prominent topic. Thus, when he spoke to the multitude in the Sermon from the Mount, he exhorted them not to lay up for themselves treasures upon earth, but in heaven. He pronounced those happy, who were reviled, falsely accused, and persecuted. But if such are pronounced happy, — if such have cause to rejoice and be exceeding glad, — it must be, not on account of their present condition, but of some future expected compensation. And he accordingly explains it by adding, — “for great is your reward in heaven.”

Beside other less distinct references to the future world in the parables, there are those of the laborers, and that of the rich man and the beggar; in which different views are presented (each of them of great importance) of the exact justice of heaven, in its provisions for future righteous retributions.

He took occasion also to connect this doctrine with some of his miracles. With that of his own resurrection he did it expressly, making it a ground of

faith in the fulfilment of his promise of a resurrection to all. Of the resurrection of Lazarus he made a similar use ; leading the attention of those, who witnessed that event, from the scene before them, to the resurrection and eternal life, which all his true disciples were to share. "I," said he "am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Such is the light that is cast by revelation upon the doctrine of immortality. Such is the clearness with which it is declared ; such the frequency and the variety of statement and illustration with which it is presented.

2. We are now to inquire, what is the nature and amount of the information, which is thus imparted ?

In the very outset of this inquiry, the remark occurs, that the information is less minute and less particular than our wishes. It is of a very general nature. Nothing is granted merely to satisfy curiosity. Scarcely is anything said, as to the particular mode of being after death. We wish to be able to trace the living principle as it passes through that change ; to follow it, and keep sight of it during its passage ; to know what is its state immediately after its mortal life is ended ; whether consciousness and thought are suspended for a season, or continue uninterrupted ; whether the being continues to act in a state of separation from all material organization, or is restored afterwards by being united to another body, a spiritual body.

In what does the resurrection consist? When

does it take place? With what bodies do we rise? When commences the state of righteous retribution, immediately at the dissolution of the body, or at some distant, unknown period? And if the latter, what will be our condition during that long interval? To what region of the universe shall we be transported? Where is the place appointed for the abode of the blessed, and for the punishment of the wicked? Shall we be confined to a particular portion of space, as here upon earth; or, with other faculties and other powers of motion, shall we be permitted to range abroad, and visit distant parts of the creation, confined to no single world or system of worlds?

To these, and many other questions, which are constantly prompted by our anxious desire to know, what is so deeply interesting to us, we find no direct and satisfactory answer. Constantly as the subject is presented to us in the writings of the New Testament, what is clear and explicit is limited to a very few important particulars. But they are all that we need for any practical purposes.

In the first place, that we are to live again, after death, the same individual, thinking, conscious beings that exist here, is a point, about which there is no room to doubt, what is the doctrine of the New Testament. Whatever change we are to undergo in passing from this to the invisible world, and whatever may be our mode of existence there, — whether with or without material bodies, — whether with the same, which we now inhabit, resuscitated, or with similar, or with different ones prepared for us, — what is cer-

tain is, that we shall know, that we are the same beings, the same persons, that lived and acted, enjoyed and suffered here. We shall carry with us the consciousness that we are the same, and the remembrance of what we had been before the change took place, of the scenes in which we had been acting, and the persons with whom we had been associated. All this, though it be nowhere expressly asserted, is clearly implied, and in a manner much more satisfactory than any direct assertion on the subject could be. In every description of the final judgment, the righteous and the wicked are represented as remembering their former life, their former actions, their former companions. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the former is represented as recollecting the latter; is familiarly reminded of the difference of their former condition, and its contrast with the present; and as not only remembering those whom he had left behind, but as still taking an interest in their lot. He asks that Lazarus may be sent to his father's house, to warn his brethren of the end of the course they were pursuing, lest those, who had been his associates in a thoughtless and wicked life here, should become the companions also of his punishment there.

And in this example, as in other passages, it is further implied, that the future life is a state of retribution. Not only is there a remembrance of the past, and a power of connecting it with the present. This remembrance is accompanied with a consciousness of moral desert and a sense of retribution. The

good man, who, with piety and patient continuance in well-doing, has finished his earthly course, enters upon a state of peace and rest, which he knows is connected with the life of virtue and faith, which preceded. The voluptuous sinner, on the other hand, has passed from a life of selfish indulgence and insensibility to the duties of the condition, in which his Maker had placed him, into a state of suffering, which reminds him of abused mercies, neglected opportunities, violated duties, and a regardlessness of the demands of the several relations in which Providence had placed him. He not only knows himself to be the same person, that lived and acted here upon earth, but is conscious of the influence of his course of life here, in determining the condition of that being upon which he is entering. He not only remembers what was the difference between him and Lazarus on earth; but he knows, that it was the difference of their disposition, and character, and improvement of their appointed lot, which has laid the foundation of the wide contrast in their condition now.

Are we anxious to know the particulars of the future retributions, to which we are appointed? in what they are to consist? how they are to be administered? Upon these points we must be satisfied with very general information. It is permitted us to know only so much, as is well consistent with our probationary state. The general doctrine meets us everywhere; but the particulars, in which it consists, are nowhere detailed. The language of the New Testament, whenever it descends to anything like partic-

ularity, is highly figurative. It is, on the one hand, shining forth as the sun, reigning with Christ, inheriting a kingdom, being kings and priests to God. On the other hand, being cast into outer darkness, exposed to unquenchable fire, and a never dying worm. But the general truth intended to be expressed, and to be expressed with deep impression by this language, is presented to us wherever the subject occurs. Never is our future being alluded to, but as a retribution; and usually it is for the very purpose of exciting our hopes and our fears; for the purpose of displaying to us, in order to influence the conduct of life, the retributions which are then to take place, corresponding to the difference of character and conduct here. It is always to show us, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and will render to every man according to his deeds, — “according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

In the third place, with respect to those, who have made a good use of the opportunities and the discipline of this life, the next will be a progressive state. Good men will not enter immediately upon a state, which admits of no improvement; nor at once attain to a perfection, which allows of no further advancement. They are to open upon a prospect, which will be perpetually enlarging before them; to commence a career of improvement, to which no limits can be assigned. Of this we find indeed in the Scriptures no explicit assertion; and we do find, what may seem to us at first to imply the contrary, namely, a condition of absolute perfection, and there-

fore stationary, not capable of being made better, nor liable to change for the worse.

But in this notion of the positive absolute perfection of the saints in glory and happiness, we probably mistake. It is certainly such as admits of different degrees in different persons. Good men, like the stars, are said to differ from one another in glory. And if in different persons, why not in the same persons at different times? since the same terms of positive and absolute import are used in application to both cases. Besides, a high degree of excellence or of happiness implies activity and exertion, and these cannot consist with a fixed, unchanging state. We are unable indeed to conceive of intellectual or moral excellence, or of the happiness belonging to an intelligent and moral being, without activity, or indeed without each of them bearing some proportion to the degree, the direction, and the success of that activity; and as little can we conceive of the activity of such a being, producing no change, accompanied with no advancement, wholly without effect. But both the progressive advancement of the future state of good men, and its being a state of action and improvement are implied in another circumstance, respecting which we have more direct information, and that, which can leave us in no doubt about it.

I mean, that it is, in the fourth place, a social state. If we carry with us our social nature, and those affections which make up a large proportion both of the virtue and the happiness of this life, we could hardly need any direct information to assure us, that



a future life, intended as a state of reward for those, who have made a right use of the present, must be one in which there is an opportunity for the full exercise of these affections; therefore a state of society, in which there is scope for the kind affections, and motives and occasion for intellectual intercourse.

But the whole language of the New Testament, when it touches this subject, is such, as strongly to imply, that the future life is to be a social state. Thus it is represented under the figure of a kingdom, where large numbers are united together in one body, under one head, forming one community. It is represented by a building, a house, a mansion, a dwelling, the abode of numbers associated together, connected by various relations holding intimate intercourse, having some common feeling and common interest to bind them together; and having the opportunity of doing mutual good offices, and of cherishing and expressing kind affections. Christians, in the future state are always spoken of, not as solitary individuals, but under some social character; "as a great assembly, an innumerable company," intimating the existence of mutual relations, easy intercourse, and all the pleasures and improvements of the social state. The virtues also to be practised, and the character to be formed here, as requisite to prepare for the heavenly state, are mostly such as lead to the expectation, that the state for which we are thus to be prepared is one, in which the social feelings will still have scope. They are the virtues of society; the dispositions that belong to the several relations of life; a character of

justice, veracity, benevolence, peace, humanity ; a character therefore belonging wholly to beings related together ; of no use, and altogether inapplicable to solitary beings.

And while it thus appears, that the social character and social condition will remain, we have intimations sufficiently clear not to be mistaken, in the fifth place, that our life will be a continuance of the present ; as in other respects, so particularly in this, that, carrying with us the remembrance of the past, the remembrance of what we were, and of the persons with whom we were connected in this life, we shall have the power and the means of knowing each other in the next. This is rendered probable from all those passages, which speak of our future life as a social state. If the society of kindred spirits is to make a part of the happiness of that state to good men, nothing would seem more desirable, or more likely, than that those virtuous intimacies and attachments, which had been begun and continued through this life, and rendered tender and strong by their continuance, would be renewed ; that it would make one part of the blessedness of the righteous to be reunited to those, to whom they had been long bound by the ties of affection here ; to be permitted to renew and perpetuate the friendships which were dissolved, and the relations which were severed by death.

But we have something more than the probability arising from passages of the kind of which we are speaking. The Apostle Paul draws one of his principal motives for activity, strenuous exertion, and

readiness to labor and to suffer in the Gospel, from the hope of presenting his spiritual children, "perfect in Christ Jesus, and thus having them for his joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming." This implies, that he expected to know and to distinguish them. And we have no reason to imagine this knowledge of those beloved and esteemed on earth to be confined to Christian teachers and their converts. The same considerations, which apply to their case, apply with similar, and in many instances with equal force, to other relations and other ties, which have closely bound together virtuous souls of congenial dispositions. And, if I mistake not, we find something to fortify this expectation, in the instructions of our Saviour himself. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, we have a solemn and affecting representation of the final judgment; the whole scenery of which seems distinctly to imply the recollection, not only of the actions and dispositions, which are to make the grounds of the final decision of the Judge; but also the recognition of the persons, toward whom those dispositions had been exercised, and who had been affected by those actions. When it is said, "then shall the righteous answer, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink? naked, and clothed thee, a stranger, and took thee in, or sick, or in prison, and visited thee? and then shall the King answer and say, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me;" noth-

ing can be more distinctly implied, than that the persons of these his brethren, who had been thus the objects of kindness, humanity, and compassion, as well as the deeds of which they were the objects, are recollected and known ; and that a part, at least, of the joy of the occasion consists in this knowledge and recollection.

I will only mention, in the sixth place, that the future life, revealed in the Gospel, is an eternal life. It is an immortal being, an everlasting life, an unfading inheritance, an imperishable treasure. This corruptible will put on incorruption, this mortal immortality. Words need not be multiplied upon this point. It is one, about which there can be no question, what is the Christian doctrine.

In the several points, which have been mentioned, the light which Christianity has cast upon our future state, is certainly of unspeakable importance. If it has not told us all that we would wish to know, it has told us what is of infinite value ; if it has not satisfied all our curiosity, it has more than satisfied all our reasonable demands. For it has taught enough for a motive of action and a ground of consolation and hope to good men. And the practical lessons to be derived from what it has made known to us, are the most obvious to notice, as well as of the most important nature.

It assures us we are to live again, after death, the same thinking, conscious, active beings. Then the great terror of death is removed,—the dread of ceasing to be, of returning to darkness and everlasting

oblivion, at which nature so shudders, and from which we so shrink with horror, has no longer any place.

We are to pass, to a state of righteous retribution, not indeed of rigid unbending justice, but of merciful allowance. The darkness then, and obscurity, which rests over so much of the allotments of this disciplinary state are dispelled, and the good man has a light shining in upon him from beyond the gloom, which enables him to maintain his onward march through it with a firm, and sure, and cheerful step. And the sinner has the most peremptory call to repentance and newness of life.

The life, upon which we are enter, is to be a progressive and improving state. What encouragement does this give to commence the progress here, and to proceed in it with resolution and activity! to form those habits, which will be of so much importance to us, as a preparation for what we shall have then to do!

It will be a social state, and, being a continuance of the present, will be a renewal of virtuous friendship; those who were united by ties of affection, and were promoters of each other's virtue and happiness here, will form a blessed society, bound together by ties which eternal ages shall not dissolve. What a motive to cultivate in ourselves, and in one another, those affections and dispositions, and virtuous habits, which shall render the relations from which we derive so much of the comfort of this life, though suspended for a short time by death, enduring as our being, and not to be destroyed by the lapse of endless ages!

It is an endless life, for which the present is a dis-

cipline and a probation. What an importance and interest should we consider this as imparting to the whole conduct of life, and to every action of it, as making a part of that influence, which is thus to extend over the whole of our future being.

These are some of the practical reflections, which should accompany our thoughts upon this subject. They should occur and be cherished by us, whenever we are led by the providence of God, by his word, or by the ordinances of religion to meditate upon that life and immortality, which were dimly seen by the light of nature, and by that of previous revelations, but are clearly brought to light by the Gospel of Christ.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## FAITH.

THE connexion of Faith with our final salvation is expressed in strong terms in many passages in the New Testament.

“This,” the Saviour declared, “was the will of him who sent him, that every one that believeth on him, might have everlasting life.”\* “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life.” “We,” said the apostle to the Hebrews, “are of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”†

From these and similar forms of expression it appears, that not an introduction merely into the visible kingdom of Christ, and a title to the external privileges of the Gospel; but that eternal life also, which is the great end of all religion, the glory and blessedness which the mercy of God has provided in a future world for the heirs of salvation, are connected with that Faith, which the Gospel requires, and are to be considered as in some sense the result of it.

With this view I shall take occasion, in the present chapter, to speak of the value of Faith, of its connexion with Morality, and of its essential or fundamental Articles.

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\* John, vi. 40; iii. 15; v. 24.

† Heb. x. 39.

I. In the first place, as to the value of Faith. What entitles it to such preëminence? what gives it so high a value, as will justify the strong expressions of the sacred writers on the subject?

Is it, that it possesses any intrinsic worth, that there is any value in the act of Faith itself?

Is it, that the presence of other virtues is implied in it?

Or is it, that every virtue must have this for its basis, so that its value and importance are derived from its influence and effects?

Perhaps it will appear, that it draws something from each of these sources, and that in a fair view of the whole we have no reason to consider its value overstated in the sacred writings.

1. Independent both of its moral influence, and of its alliance with other qualities or exercises of the mind, or of the heart, it is an indication of something right in him, in whom it is found. For faith is not a mere operation of the understanding. That is an imperfect and inadequate view of it, which represents it as merely the act of assenting to the truth, according to the evidence with which it is presented. This may be a sufficient account, where the truth in question is perfectly indifferent, and we neither feel nor can feel any interest in the decision. In every such case, the act of assenting or dissenting may imply no exercise of the moral faculty.

But when religion is the subject in question, it will not be pretended that this is the case. Here, our highest interests are depending. The principles of ac-



tion are in question, by which our lives are to be governed. Arduous duties are to be performed, or their obligation avoided. Motives the most powerful, hopes and fears of the highest kind, are to be adopted or rejected. Now with every passion and affection of the heart thus called into exercise, and with every real and imaginary interest at stake, will belief or unbelief be the mere cool act of the understanding, deciding impartially and disinterestedly according to evidence? Can it be, that the heart shall not have a share in it, as well as the mind? Some degree of merit must belong to that faith, where in opposition to strong temptation of prejudice, or feeling, or passion, or supposed interest, the decision of the mind is yet according to truth, and in obedience to evidence.

2. Such a decision again implies a suitable attention to the subject, and a faithful exercise of the faculties upon it. A reasonable faith is no more, than knowledge, the acquisition of sloth and the reward of inattention and negligence. It is the fruit of diligence employed with fidelity and fairness; of an impartial, well directed search after truth, accompanied always with a readiness to receive it, when presented to the mind on proper evidence.

Whenever we speak of the virtue of Faith, and of good desert in believing, it is implied that its object is truth, that the truth is supported by sufficient evidence to claim a reasonable assent, and that nothing more is required to perceive it, than diligent and impartial inquiry. Belief without evidence, or against it, is the

same moral exercise as unbelief. For it implies the same negligence, partiality, or perverseness.

But the faith of a Christian implies something more than diligent and honest and faithful research, resulting in the attainment of the object, truth. There is something more to prompt and to accompany it. To perceive this, we have only to consider, what it is to receive the truths of Christianity.

It is to believe in doctrines the most humiliating to the human heart, and of the most awful and tremendous import. It is to believe in the obligation and necessity of the deepest repentance, of the most exalted piety and purity, of the strictest virtue, reaching to the thoughts and affections, and of the most difficult and self-denying habits and practices.

It is to believe, that everlasting consequences of unspeakable importance are to follow the improvement or the neglect of the opportunities of the present life; that this world, full as it is of labor, and sorrow, and temptation, and sin, is a discipline for eternity; that although virtue and vice are here permitted together, and the righteous and wicked are in a great measure undistinguished in the distributions of the present transitory state; yet a final condition awaits them of exact retribution; that it is the appointment of heaven, that virtue shall finally triumph, that truth and justice, and purity and charity, shall forever reign, and the righteous only inherit that blessed state.

Now, to lend a willing and cheerful ear to such doctrines as these, — does it not seem to imply a

heart already well disposed, already possessing some good dispositions, already feeling something of the love of virtue? To contemplate with satisfaction such a faith, when proposed, and readily embrace it on such evidence as would be satisfactory on other subjects,—must there not exist some previous love of virtue, some relish for holiness, some antecedent wish for a state, in which these shall prevail; at least, a mind ready to fall in with the purposes of heaven, and reconciled to the obligations they impose?

To a corrupt heart and depraved taste the great truths of religion are unwelcome. They are contemplated with no affection, are examined with no favorable disposition, are received with hesitation and reluctance; for no complacency is felt in a holy and righteous government, under which virtue is to be eventually triumphant, and all impurity and vice to receive their just punishment. An opposite interest indeed is to be expected, and a hostile spirit, quicksighted to discover defect of evidence, ingenious in framing objections, and fruitful in resources of doubt. A readiness then to receive the great truths of religion, the faith declared to be connected with everlasting life the salvation of the soul, is entitled to all the praise and the high promises annexed to it in the gospel, as it indicates the existence of right dispositions, and the presence of other virtues. “He that will do his will, shall know of the doctrine.” He will easily distinguish the truth, because he comes with a mind ready, cheerfully to receive and obey it.

3. But the influence of faith on practice is also to come into our estimate of its value and importance. It is the basis of every virtue. No act of religious obedience can exist without it. It must accompany the first approach to the Deity. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is." More than this; he must have some notion of his perfections and government; that he exercises a righteous administration over men; that he makes a distinction between those who regard, and those who disregard his authority; and is a rewarder "of those, who diligently seek him."

Nor is faith less important as the basis of every other virtue, and the motive of every other act of religious obedience, than of the worship immediately addressed to God. It is as intimately and inseparably connected with the social virtues, and with domestic and personal duties, as with those of piety to God. Nor is it only that the principle of religious faith produces the act; it is necessary also to render the act, when it is performed, a virtuous act. It is necessary to give it a moral character. The same external act may be either virtuous, indifferent, or criminal, according as it has religious faith, or some other principle, for its motive. In the former case, it becomes an act of obedience to God; in the latter, it may either be criminal, as the fruit of some base and worldly passion, or indifferent, as the result of principles and motives, which call for no moral exercise whatever.

From these views of the intrinsic excellence of

faith, the virtues of the heart implied in it, its powerful influence on practice, and the consideration, that it constitutes the virtue of those actions to which it excites, and of which it is the principle and motive, we can be at no loss as to the estimate we ought to make of its value and importance.

II. In these views we may also see, and this is what we were next to speak of, What is the connexion of Faith with Morality.

It is a connexion the most close, and intimate, and indissoluble. It is that of the motive and the deed, that of the cause and the effect, that of the foundation and the superstructure. In exalting the value of faith, then, we say nothing to lessen the necessity of good works, much less to imply that they are at variance, or in any degree incompatible with each other. To separate them is to disunite things, which are in nature, and forever ought to be, joined together.

Faith is essential as the root, good works as the growth and the fruit from it ; the one as the principle, the other as the evidence of it, and its proper effect. Without the former, the latter were imperfect ; without the latter, the former is declared to be dead and of no value.

This is the language of reason ; it is the language also of the New Testament.

Neither of them may we depreciate ; nor may we so exalt the one, as to imply the unimportance of the other. It will give equally a false view, to represent either of them as unnecessary, or either as sufficient without the other.

Faith has the promise of everlasting life ; shall we then infer that nothing else is required, and that a good life is useless ? A good life is necessary as a condition of salvation, and a qualification for it. Shall we then undervalue that faith, and deem it of no use, which is the only sure foundation of a good life ?

That the principle, in which a life of religious obedience must have its foundation, should ever have been thought unimportant, might surprise us, but for that known principle, running through all nature, and in human nature not less visible than in everything else, the tendency of extremes to produce their opposites ; the disposition to fly to the opposite extreme, from one which we contemplate with peculiar aversion or dread, as full of guilt or danger. The extreme of representing Faith as alone necessary, was that probably, which led to the opposite opinion of its entire indifference ; and the contempt and neglect of good works, which went hand in hand with that sentiment, was the occasion of their being exalted in turn, so as to supersede all other qualifications for the divine favor. The abuse of the doctrine of salvation by Faith to purposes of fanaticism, and hypocrisy, and a loose morality, led, not as it ought, to the correction of the abuse, and the restoration of the doctrine of the New Testament to its proper meaning and legitimate influence ; but, as too often happens in similar cases, to its entire rejection ; and those who perceived the absurdity and the bad practical tendency of an opinion, which professedly superseded morality, or tacitly undermined it, ran eagerly into the opposite

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scheme of holding that to be nothing which they could not admit to be everything.

On the other hand. Without a reference to this same principle as its origin, we might well be filled with surprise, that any should be found, professing to be Christians and having the Gospel in their hands, to depreciate morality, and speak of it with disrespect, especially to represent attention to it as dangerous or unnecessary. But with this in our view, the most extravagant opinions on this subject are accounted for. They sprang up in the heat of the Reformation, and had their origin in the excitement which was then produced by the shameless abuses of the church of Rome, relative to the doctrine of merit.

In that church, and at that period, good works were not only taught to be meritorious in the sight of God, and available to salvation ; they were also applied as a commutation for sins, and the benefit of them was transferable to others. And what were the good works thus represented and thus employed ? Did they consist in a life of piety, holiness, righteousness, benevolence, and truth ; in personal purity, active charity, and fidelity in all the relations of life ? Not so. Nothing was less thought of than such a system. It was to found monasteries, to endow religious houses, to bequeath money for masses, and for prayers to be offered for the deliverance of souls in purgatory. These were the deeds by which salvation was supposed to be merited, and by the performance of which men expected, not only to ensure their

own deliverance from the punishment of their sins, but to procure also that of others.

To accomplish the purposes of the reformation, by drawing men away from a system of which this was so important a part, it was necessary to expose this error. It was necessary to depreciate the value of works, which were the theme of eloquent panegyric, and the subject of constant and earnest exhortation, and which were so useful an engine for supporting the fabric of superstition and ecclesiastical tyranny ; and for their subserviency to these purposes, were honored with the title of good works, by way of eminence. But, as usually happens, in their zeal to explode opinions, which they perceived to be of such dangerous influence and fatal tendency, the reformers, some of them at least, rushed hastily into the opposite error. The censures, which were due only to the exaggerated value placed on those works, to which a worldly policy had appropriated the epithet good, they applied without distinction to all works of righteousness.

Not satisfied with denying that the best human actions, performed from the best principles, can be meritorious in the sight of God in such a sense as to be entitled to eternal rewards ; and accordingly asserting, that salvation is still of grace ; in order to exalt the merits of the Saviour, and to show the necessity of making them the foundation of all claim to reward and all hope of acceptance, they thought it necessary to apply not only to human nature, but to the best of human actions, the most degrading and vilifying lan-



guage ; to speak of them, not only as having no merit, and no share in procuring salvation, but as unnecessary to it ; and not only as unnecessary, but even as dangerous.

We need only to be reminded of the expressions of Luther, the great champion of the Reformation, struck out in the heat of controversy, in supporting the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone ; “ that not only were good works not necessary to salvation ; but how good soever they might appear, they were mortal sins.” \* And those of a similar character, by one of his most distinguished followers ; “ that good works were an impediment to salvation.” †

That such an opinion could be held by men, thus distinguished for their talents, and learning, and zeal, and services in effecting the reformation of Christianity from its corruptions, should teach us a humbling lesson of human weakness, and of the power of pas-

\* Du Pin's Compendious Hist. Vol. iv. p. 16. Hey's Lect. Vol. iii. p. 261.

“ It is certain, that Luther carried the doctrine of Justification by Faith to such an extravagant length, as seemed, though perhaps contrary to his intention, to derogate, not only from the necessity of good works, but even from their obligation and importance. He would not allow them to be considered either as the conditions or means of salvation, nor even as a preparation for receiving it.” — Mosh. Eccl. Hist. Cent. xvi. sect. 3, part 2, ch. 1.

† These expressions were used by Amsdorf, in his controversy with George Major, who maintained against him, the necessity of good works. — Mosh. Cent. xvi. sect. 3, part 2, ch. 1.

sion and prejudice ever minds of the highest order ; and how necessary it is in all our inquiries to guard against their influence. And may I add, if such men needed the apologies of candor for their errors, how ready should we be to extend it to others, who, with equal honesty, may have fallen into mistakes as strange, and of as dangerous tendency !

III. When the value and importance of Faith are admitted, and also its connexion with morality, the question remains, what is the Christian Faith ? what articles are fundamental ? essential to be believed to constitute a Christian ?

Amidst the variety of opinions maintained by those who claim the Christian name, all deemed of high importance by their respective advocates and defenders, — opinions, not seldom in irreconcilable opposition to each other, — it might at first seem a hopeless attempt to come to a decision satisfactory even to one's own mind, on this question. But the difficulty is less than in such a case might be expected ; and the answer to this question is probably easier, and lies within a narrower compass, than may at first be imagined. The distinguishing tenets of the several sects of Christians, which constitute the points of controversy between them, whatever factitious value the spirit of controversy may impart to them, never relate to what is fundamental to the Christian Faith ; seldom, it is probable, to what is of very high importance.

Confining ourselves to the plain declarations of the Evangelists and Apostles, it will be found, that a single article only, the belief in Jesus as the Christ, made

the faith and profession of the first converts. This was the profession of Nathaniel, this the declaration of Martha, this the faith proposed by Peter to the three thousand converted on the day of the Pentecost, and this the faith of the Ethiopian officer baptized by Philip.\*

It has often been said, and the assertion seems to me to be correct, and to be fully and distinctly supported by the New Testament ; “ that whoever was convinced of this truth, and took on him the profession of this faith by being baptized into the name of Christ, was considered as thus acknowledging his authority and submitting to it. He was accordingly entitled to Christian communion, and to all the privileges of being within the pale of the church. He belonged to that one flock and one fold, which was gathered together under the one great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. He was of that heavenly kingdom, which Jesus Christ had established in the world, and of which he was the sole head and king.” †

No other article of faith appears to have been required on the one hand, or declared on the other. It was not because this was the whole amount of the Christian faith, that it was confined to this single proposition. It was because the true and hearty assent to this truth implied the reception of all others, included in it, or following fairly from it. It implied, there-

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\* John i. 49, xi. 27 ; Acts ii. 14-36, viii. 37.

† Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, and Benson's Reasonableness of the Christian Religion.

fore, the acknowledgment of his divine mission, and a belief in the miraculous evidence by which it was supported, in the doctrine he taught, in all the truths he delivered, in all the representations he gave of the design of his mission and of the nature of his religion ; in the necessity and the obligation of all that purity and perfection of virtue, which he taught, a virtue extending to all the relations of life, to every action, to every thought and purpose of the heart ; in the motives by which he enforced his precepts, especially in the doctrine of immortality, a resurrection, a righteous judgment, and the retributions of a future life, adjusted to the conduct and character of the present. All this, and much more than this, must have been comprehended in the faith of him, who believed in Jesus as the Christ. And all this, together with its practical influence in a correspondent life, must then have appeared, as they must always appear, in the character of the true Christian.

If it now be asked, whether this single article of faith be all that is necessary for Christians, the answer will depend on the reply to another question, namely, Necessary to what purpose ? If it be said, necessary to constitute a Christian in distinction from a Jew, a heathen, an infidel, or a man of any other religion ; the reply will be, that it is the article and the single article by which the Christian, as such, is distinguished. He cannot be a nominal Christian without it, whatever other truths, which make a part of the Christian scheme, he may receive ; and with it, however ignorant he may seem to us to be of the principles and

the design of the gospel, and however defective or erroneous his views of the Christian doctrine may appear, the Christian name is not to be denied him.

But if the question be, whether this single article of faith be all that is necessary to salvation, the reply will be different. No number of articles can be specified, which are necessary for every one in order to salvation ; nor can any be named, which are alone sufficient for every one. The reason is, that what is essential to be known and believed by different persons, must vary, as their capacities and opportunities vary. The number of fundamental or essential doctrines in this respect can never be determined ; for every Christian, as far as his situation, talents, and opportunities are peculiar to himself, must have a distinct catalogue, obligatory on him, but binding on no one else. Leisure, capacity, opportunity, and motives for inquiry lay a reasonable foundation for higher demands of knowledge and of faith ; while less will be required where opportunities less favorable have been given.

Let me add, that so far is it from being requisite, that all should assent to the same articles of faith, that what is actually a fundamental doctrine to one, another may be under no obligation to receive as an article of faith. Besides, a natural difference in the strength or clearness of the understanding, a difference of education, and a nameless variety of circumstances over which they have no control, may lay obligations on some, which extend not to others, and present truths to those with such light and evidence as to

render the assent to them obligatory, of which these may very innocently be ignorant, or, misunderstanding their nature or their evidence, may reject as errors. What seems to be essential is, not that this or the other truth be clearly understood and assented to, in a certain form ; but that in adopting the opinions, which are to make the sum of his faith, he be a pious, humble, upright, and faithful inquirer.

Can it be, that the same faith is required of all, however different their means of coming to the knowledge of the truth? Can it be, that even the first and fundamental article of the Christian faith is obligatory on him, and essential to his salvation, who, living where the light of the gospel has not reached, has never even heard of the Saviour? He cannot in these circumstances be a nominal Christian ; but will any say, that he cannot have all that faith, that is necessary to his salvation? Will any venture to pronounce, that such are placed by the inevitable lot of their being, out of the range of the divine mercy, out of the limits of that faith which is connected with salvation? Will any maintain, that so large a portion of our race, as have passed their lives where the light of the Christian doctrine, and even the name of the author of our faith, has never reached them, are, by the condition of their being, excluded from their Maker's favor? We cannot for a moment abstract from our notion of a righteous God, that he requires of each one, only what is possible in the circumstances in which he is placed, and will approve and accept him, whose faith, whatever it be, is correspond-

ent to his condition and means, and is productive of its proper fruits. "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DUTY OF FAITHFUL INQUIRY.

I HAVE endeavored to present a statement of some of those doctrines of our religion, which are regarded with a peculiar interest, as well on account of their real importance, as on account of prevailing differences of opinion about them, and the controversy, which, at different times, in all ages, has been agitated respecting them.

That, on important subjects of universal interest, such differences of opinion should exist among intelligent, inquiring, and honest men, is a circumstance that must naturally excite a more lively interest on the subject; nor ought it perhaps to be a surprising or unexpected thing, if, in some minds, it should awaken doubts, and lead to skepticism, as it has done, on the whole subject of religion. But what may account for such a result, as a matter of fact, may come far short of justifying it as reasonable. And doubtless in similar cases we should not come hastily to such a conclusion.

In philosophy, for example, in legislation, in medicine, in education, diversity of opinion, even among the most distinguished writers, leads to no such conclusion. Amidst all the war of words and opinions, we still have no doubt, that in philosophy there is



some truth, though we may not be able to agree what it is ; that in education there is a right course, as well as a wrong one ; that in legislation there are principles and maxims of right, notwithstanding the interminable disputes about them ; and that in medicine, whether discovered, or discoverable by man or not, there is a system, a practice having its foundation in truth, and adapted to the human constitution.

Upon these subjects, and many others, the degree of uncertainty in which the subject is involved, and the consequent diversity of opinions and practice, have led intelligent and reflecting men to perceive, in the first place, the obligation of faithful and patient inquiry ; and in the next place, whatever be the result of inquiry, the duty of friendly dispositions, and kind and courteous conduct toward those, whose inquiries have terminated differently,—not allowing speculative differences to alienate those, and separate them from each other, who are bound together by other ties, nor to disturb social order and peace, while they remain together.

Can a better course than this be recommended to Christians in respect to those different views of truth and duty, between which they are divided ? Let us look at the subject deliberately, and examine it in the several aspects, in which it may present itself.

With respect to the first point,—the obligation of faithful and patient inquiry,—little need be said, since none will deny, in words at least, that it is the duty of every one to examine the grounds of his own faith, and the correctness of his opinions. Yet, how

far such examination is actually made, even by those who admit that it ought to be, may be reasonably doubted. For, how liable are we to deceive ourselves as to the fidelity with which we look into the grounds of our religious opinions, however honestly we may intend it! Those opinions have been long in the mind, regarded as unquestionable truths; were first received, perhaps, among our earliest impressions, with the unhesitating trust which belongs to that period of our being; associated with names and persons the most venerated, and with the most cherished recollections; those also, which are most liable to objection, so closely connected with first principles, as to seem inseparable from them, and thus to be regarded with the same veneration, and as standing or falling with them.

When, therefore, we are invited to examine into their foundation, we are at first perhaps deterred by an opinion of their sacredness, and an apprehension of the absurdity or sinfulness of the very doubt implied in any inquiry upon the subject. And when this fear is so far overcome, as to allow of entering upon the inquiry, it is in danger of being conducted under such influences, as to give very little hope of an impartial issue. This is the case with those, whose privilege it is to have received a religious education, and in whom that education has produced its effects by forming them to a religious character.

On the other hand, from a similar cause, operating in a different manner, those are also indisposed to this fair examination, and in a measure disqualified for it,

upon whose early years no religious instruction has been bestowed ; and upon whose hearts no religious impressions have been made. A state of mind has been thus superinduced, which is unfavorable to religion, and prejudice is to be combatted, and hostility encountered at every step.

This duty of subjecting our systems of religious faith to a careful examination, may be regarded in more than one point of view, according as the question lies between religion and no religion ; or, between any of the several forms, in which it may be presented to our judgment and choice. And in each of these aspects it presents a question of deep interest. In each the duty is of indispensable obligation, and there are mistakes and defects to be carefully guarded against.

1. As to the general truth of religion, its importance, and its obligation ; we are not to imagine the duty in question superseded, or rendered useless or improper, by our having received a careful religious education. It is still required of us as reasonable, free, and accountable beings, to make that a matter of evidence and of rational conviction, which before could only be a matter of authority. No reproach or censure is implied in the application of the term authority, or, if you please, prejudice, to that faith which is received by education, at a period when the mind is not sufficiently matured to judge of its foundation. It may be not only proper, but a duty, to receive religion at first upon authority. It is the condition of our being ; since, if received at all at that early period, when its

influence is most wanted in forming the character, it must be upon mere authority. But it is not necessary for it to remain upon that foundation alone afterward, nor can we be excused if we suffer it so to remain, after we have become capable of estimating the evidence upon which it stands, and have the requisite means of doing it.

But, if religion has not made a part of early education, this inquiry is needed to supply the want. Prudence as well as duty demand it. It is as little consistent with safety as with the answer of a good conscience, to neglect it; since, if it have its foundation in truth and reality, it is of the most momentous interest to us.

Now with that portion of understanding, which God has given to all to be the guide of life, can we be held innocent, or can we deem it safe, to neglect its use upon a subject, by which the whole conduct of life and the highest interests of our being are affected? If thus neglecting we come to a wrong judgment, can we flatter ourselves with the expectation of escaping the consequences, which God has seen fit to annex?

It is certainly a motive of sufficient strength to a faithful examination of the truth of religion in general, that we know its value, its influence upon character, upon the conduct of life, and upon the interests of the life that now is and of the life to come; and that we have some apprehension of its authority, as founded in original and unalterable relations. If those relations between man and the Author of his being

do exist ; if God is indeed the Maker and righteous Governor of the world, and man is indeed a dependant, moral and accountable being, destined to another life, and appointed to a just retribution ; duties certainly of high obligation must be connected with those relations, and grow out of them. It can consist neither with innocence nor with safety to withhold the homage of our gratitude, obedience, and trust from Him, who is the Author of all the beauty, and order, and magnificence, and usefulness, that we see, and of all the good that is provided for us, and for all beings throughout the universe.

2. But this is not all. When we shall have settled the question as to the value and obligation of religion in general, we are still further called upon to choose between the several forms under which it is presented ; and in order to this we have to examine their several claims.

It may not be our duty to enter into an accurate investigation of the merits and the evidences of all the opposite systems and conflicting opinions that have been held among Christians ; but, of those, which fall under our constant notice, which are maintained in our own times, which purport to be drawn from the same books, to which we ourselves appeal, it may be our duty to have some knowledge ; at least to have made such comparison between them, as will enable us to give a reason, if we be asked, for our preference of that form of faith, which we have chosen.

And this obligation is equally strong upon which-

ever side the truth be supposed to lie, in the contest between the two opposite schemes of doctrine, which chiefly divide the Christian community.

For if one of those schemes of doctrine be that, which the Scriptures teach when rightly understood and fairly interpreted, the unspeakable importance of our knowing that it is so, cannot be questioned ; since the system itself makes a right faith, as to those articles which are peculiar to itself, little short of essential to salvation ; admitting no exception, and allowing no compromise with those who reject its peculiarities ; however firmly those great truths may be held, which belong to no party, but are held in common by all. Nor will the importance of this inquiry be materially diminished, should the other scheme of faith be found to be that, which was once delivered to the saints. Upon this issue, indeed, the same degree of importance is not attached to those opinions, which make the subject of controversy. But though the opinions themselves be deemed of secondary consideration only, that state of mind which excites to faithful inquiry, and leads to the knowledge of the truth, is not so.

It is sometimes said, that those cannot be supposed to engage with a deep and lively interest in religious inquiry, that they must indeed feel great indifference respecting religious truth, who lay but little stress upon those opinions by which they are distinguished from others, and who consider no particular form of speculative faith as essential. But is such an assertion warranted by the reason of the thing, or

conformable to fact? Will it follow, because we maintain the innocence and safety of error in an honest and faithful inquirer, that we must therefore consider it excusable in him, who has neglected to inquire at all? or that he is blameless, who has adopted false opinions through a careless and obstinate neglect of truth, and disregard of evidence? And is it true as a matter of fact? If it be so, what account is to be given of the unwearied labors which have been employed in patient research in the investigation of truth, in bringing all the resources of learning to the explanation and illustration of the scriptures, in drawing from those inestimable books the pure instructions which they contain, and in faithful endeavors to separate from the system of Christian doctrine, all that is of human origin and of human contrivance?

We do indeed believe, and we rejoice in the belief, that God will not reject the honest and faithful man, though in the prosecution of his inquiries, he should commit great mistakes, and fall into hurtful errors; because we suppose, that it is not speculative but moral truth, that is the object of the divine approbation; and that, accordingly, not the acquisition of abstract truth, but the love of truth and the sincere desire and faithful endeavor to promote it, is what he will approve and accept. In this view of the subject, then, we are chargeable with no inconsistency, if we lay little comparative stress upon mere articles of faith, in those points upon which Christians differ, so far as the virtue or the safety of the individual are concerned; while at the same time a deep

interest is felt and great earnestness manifested in the investigation of truth, and in endeavors to promote and to extend the knowledge of it.

For while we believe that he who seeks the truth with a single and upright aim will be accepted of God, though he should fail of its attainment, and mistake error for truth; we believe also, that he who is indifferent to the truth and regardless of it, will be entitled to no credit for the correctness of opinions, which he has been led to adopt from other causes, than the love of truth and a faithful pursuit of it. Though, therefore, we may attach less importance than others to those particular opinions by which we are distinguished from them; we do not admit that we have less value than they for that love of truth, which leads to the most diligent and faithful exertions to ascertain where it is to be found, and to distinguish it from whatever might counterfeit its appearance, and be mistaken for it; and, when once discovered, to hold and retain it with a steadfast resolution.

In the duty we are considering, that of looking into the foundation of our faith and opinions, there are mistakes to be guarded against. We must not exaggerate the value of those particular doctrines, about which we inquire, and between which we are to choose, nor mistake in what their value consists. It is an over-estimate of speculative truth, even of that which relates to the most interesting points, to regard it as an ultimate end and to pursue it as such; and to rest satisfied with a right faith, as if that were religion itself, and not, as it in fact is, the instrument and means of



religion. Religion consists, not in our having right views either of truth or of duty, but in our being brought to that state of the affections, and that subjection of the will to the will of God, and that conformity of the life to his requirements, to which right views of truth and duty contribute, and in which their value and use consist.

Another mistake not less to be guarded against, is that which relates to the reasons upon which it is deemed a duty to be earnest in our exertions to maintain, defend, and explain the peculiarities of our faith. It is not because those peculiarities are imagined to be essential in such a sense, that one cannot be a Christian without them; and that all other forms of faith are unsafe, even to him who holds them with a good conscience; but because we doubt not that truth is closely connected with virtue, and is more favorable to its advancement than error, and that just views of God and of duty are more likely than false ones to form a good character. Besides, every one is answerable, not less for the fidelity with which he examines into the foundation of his faith, than for that with which he regulates his conduct; and is bound to be earnest in extending to others the benefit of those opinions, to which he has been brought by faithful inquiry, and which are closely connected with important duties and interests.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS TOWARD EACH OTHER.

WE cannot examine too carefully into the grounds of our faith. And when we have examined faithfully, and are satisfied what is to be received as religious truth, and what to be rejected as error, the faith which has been thus honestly and deliberately chosen, we can hardly adhere to with too much steadiness and resolution.

But in this faithfulness of examination and steadfast adherence to truth, a part only of duty has been performed. There is another part of duty not less requiring to be urged, because, I fear, not less likely to be neglected.

It relates to the dispositions proper to be cherished, and the conduct to be observed toward others, who may be presumed to have been as honest in their inquiries as one's self, but whose inquiries have terminated in an opposite result; yet in opinions, in the truth of which they have not less confidence, and to which they are not less attached.

There are two effects which very naturally follow from one's having carefully studied his system of faith, and made himself master of the arguments by which it is to be defended, and the manner in which it is to be explained. The first is, a high degree of confidence in its truth, in all its parts; and a belief, that

whatever contradicts it in any of its parts, must be error. The other is, a high opinion of the importance of truths, in the study of which so much labor has been expended. And not unfrequently will our estimate, both of their truth and their importance be enhanced by our finding them called in question, and opposite opinions maintained by others.

This is doubtless the case, in a greater or less degree, on each side of every religious controversy; modified by circumstances of personal character, intellectual and moral temperament, the degree of enlargement or contraction of mind and of views, with which those inquiries have been connected, and other principles and opinions, metaphysical or philosophical, with which they are associated in the mind.

Now although much of this is doubtless excessive, and requires to be moderated and reduced to reasonable and just limits, it is not to be wholly and universally condemned. Earnestness and zeal are commendable. But they can only be excited by a sense of value and importance in the object about which they are employed; and they become excessive, and require to be restrained, only when they are disproportioned to the real importance of the point upon which the question turns. And this will be the case, when, turning upon subordinate points, those points are overestimated.

When first principles and primary truths are in question, — such as the being of God, his moral attributes, and the great purposes and ends of his moral government, — or when the revelation he has given

is rejected, and the Scriptures in which it is contained are set aside,—it becomes us to contend earnestly for faith, we cannot contend too earnestly ; and we may be allowed to say of him who denies these, that he denies the Christian faith. Our earnestness indeed, and the interest we feel in this case, must be equal to our attachment to religion itself, and the value at which we estimate its importance. It must equal our sense of duty to the Author of our being, and of obligation to him for the blessings he has provided both for the life through which we are now passing, and for the immortality which he has revealed in the Gospel of his Son.

It is otherwise in questions of a subordinate nature. Where the difference relates, not to the being of God, which is equally maintained on both sides, but to some circumstances, perhaps even undefinable and inexplicable, in his mode of being ; not to his moral attributes, which are also asserted by each, but to the manner in which those attributes are supposed to be exerted in accomplishing the great purposes of his moral government ; not to the authority of that revelation which God has given of his will and purposes in the Holy Scriptures, for to that each bows with the same reverence and entire submission ; but to critical questions relating to the books in which that revelation is communicated, or to the interpretation of the words in which it is conveyed ; — with respect to all such differences, there is room for a very different state of mind and of feeling, and ground for quite another course of conduct from what would be justi-

fiable, and might even be required of us, in the other case.

This distinction has not always been sufficiently regarded; and by neglecting it, those who make the same Christian profession have sometimes been led to a spirit and a course of conduct toward each other, wholly unbecoming those who receive the same books as their rule of faith and life, profess subjection to the same master, worship the same God, acknowledge the same Saviour, and rely on the same promises.

With such ties of a common faith, a common duty, and a common hope to bind them together, it were to have been expected,—even had there been less than there is of a direct bearing upon the subject in the discourses of our Saviour and the writings of the apostles,—that Christians would not have allowed their affections to be withdrawn from each other, their order and peace to be disturbed, and their religion exposed to reproach by the violence and animosities and bad passions of its professors and defenders. How much is it to be lamented, that the restraints of the Gospel should have been so little felt; that men should have been so slow to receive lessons of peace and mutual forbearance from the exhortations of the apostles on this subject; and from the stress laid by the Saviour himself upon the disposition manifested by his followers toward each other, as that which was to distinguish his true disciples; “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.” But more than this; Christians have sometimes treated each other in a manner which could not have

been justified toward those who rejected their religion, and were even active in endeavors to destroy its authority and to subvert its foundation. They have contended for modes of faith with a bitterness and asperity which would have been unwarranted in defence of the faith itself. They have inflicted punishments for a wrong faith upon Christian brethren, which their Master never authorized them to inflict, which he even taught them to forbear, toward his open enemies and opposers. They have not indeed called down fire from heaven, but they have kindled it on earth, for the purpose of consuming those, against whom the only crime they had to allege was, that of understanding the Scriptures in a different sense from themselves, and drawing from them a different system of doctrine. Nor has this spirit, so foreign from that of the Gospel, been manifested only by a single sect of Christians. It has been the disgrace and the crime of different sects, in their turn, as they had the power to claim an authority over the faith of others.

But it may perhaps be thought needless and unseasonable, in this age of religious improvement and liberty, to speak of deeds which belonged to the intellectual darkness and moral degradation of ages, which are gone by ; and are only remembered by Christians of the present day to excite astonishment, commiseration, and horror. We do not indeed witness the same forms of persecution which prevailed in ages past, and in other regions. The rights which belong to every man, as an intellectual and moral being, ac-

countable only at the tribunal of heaven, are too well understood and guarded by modern institutions of civil government, at least in this country, to admit of the grosser violations. But however there may be now less of the spirit which then led to them, we are not to suppose that it is wholly extinguished. There are other forms in which it may appear; like every other passion of the human heart, and every other disposition of men, it may be expected to vary the form in which it exhibits itself, in accommodation to the state of things in all other respects.

We have but an inadequate view of the subject, if, in our notion of persecution, we confine ourselves to that of the infliction of physical evils; such as harassing men with civil prosecutions, depriving them of their property, separating them from their friends, plunging them into prisons, exposing them to the rack, and bringing them to the stake.

Without any of this, there may be all the spirit and the essence, and therefore all the guilt of persecution. The same spirit, which could effect all this in one age and country, in another may be compelled to content itself with far humbler exercises of power, and to expend its energies in producing less terrible effects. Curtailed of its power by its separation from the civil authority, it has only what may be thought comparatively harmless weapons to wield, and wounds, little to be regarded, to inflict.

But, if the evils which Christians have it in their power to inflict upon their fellow Christians are less formidable, the spirit and disposition manifested in them

may be as foreign from that of the Gospel, and as unlike that which was inculcated by the Saviour, as when it wielded the whole power of the state in the hands of a Roman pontiff, or had at its disposal the chains, the racks, and the flames of the inquisition. And he, of whatever sect he may be, whether Catholic or Protestant, and to whichever of the subdivisions of either he may belong ; who is ready to exercise, to its utmost extent, all the power he has over the faith and the conscience of another, we have no reason to doubt, would be ready to use more, were it given him. There is therefore good reason, that Christians should be admonished against the indulgence of a spirit and disposition, inconsistent with what they owe to each other, as being each one singly and individually accountable to God only ; the same reason that there was, when in a different state of the world, this spirit and disposition had a wider field and ampler range, and other instruments and other means at its disposal.

And while there is thus, as we see, less difference than we are sometimes ready to imagine, between the spirit, which in one age seeks to make men sound in the faith, and to produce a uniformity in their profession by the terrors of the dungeon, the gibbet, and the stake ; and that, which in another aims at the same end by less sanguinary means ; there is probably also less difference, than there seems to us on a slight view of the subject, in the magnitude of the evils, that are inflicted on the one hand, and sustained on the other.



. We regard with admiration and reverence as martyrs, those who have sacrificed their possessions, their liberty, or life, to God and their conscience. But will a strength of religious principle much less powerful be sufficient to sustain him, the declaration of whose faith must separate him from his friends, expose him to calumny and misrepresentation, require him to change his condition and course of life, and make him to be regarded as an enemy of that truth, which is yet most dear to him, and for which he is ready to labor and to suffer ?

Now in proportion as there is merit in submitting voluntarily to sufferings and deprivations for conscience' sake, guilt must be incurred, and censure deserved by him, who inflicts the injury. Each one has a right to use his own liberty only in such a manner, as shall neither impair that of another, nor interfere with its exercise. Each one also, however tenaciously he may adhere to his own opinions, and hold them with confidence, is bound to be willing that he, whose speculations have run in a different course and whose inquiries issued in a different result, should exercise the same liberty, and hold the opposite faith with equal confidence, without danger and without fear. This is what we owe to those, to whose articles of faith we cannot assent. It is no part of our duty to surrender our opinions to theirs ; but it is our duty neither to demand nor to expect the sacrifice of theirs to ours. We are not required to think our own opinions of little value ; but we are required not to take offence that others attach an equal degree of import-

ance to opposite opinions. It is no fault in us, to hold fast the faith in the grounds of which we are ourselves satisfied ; but it will be our fault, if we take offence, that our neighbor holds equally fast the opposite faith, in the grounds of which his inquiries have led him to equal confidence and satisfaction. Further still, it is no violation of the kindness and the justice which Christians owe to their fellow Christians, to use active exertions to make the views of Christian truth by which we are distinguished, understood and received by others ; but it will be a violation of the rights of others, if this is accompanied with a censorious spirit, and if we complain, when similar exertions are made by them in defence of their opinions, and in propagating doctrines from which we dissent.

All that is essential as a motive or a means of holiness, and to secure the approbation and favor of heaven, may be held in simplicity, amidst great diversity of religious faith ; and therefore no duty is more binding upon Christians, than mutual forbearance and good will, a readiness to be silent upon points of difference, or, when there is occasion to speak of them, to do it with gentleness, decorum, and mutual respect ; a readiness to coöperate cheerfully in all efforts to preserve union, friendly intercourse, and Christian fellowship, and to join in labors for advancing a common cause, and promoting whatever may contribute to human improvement and the highest interests of man.

It is our duty, having proved all things, to hold fast that which is good ; to think right opinions of

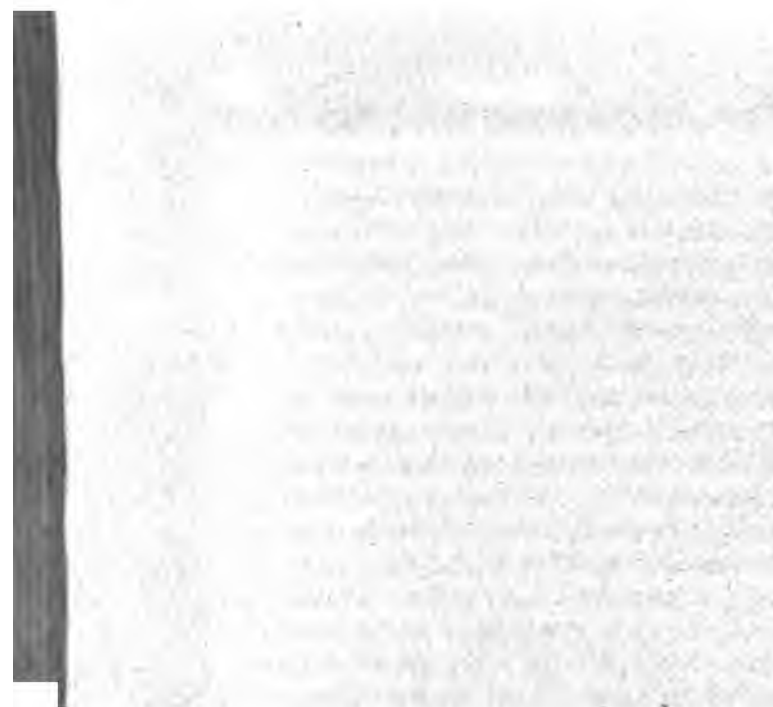
some importance, and to maintain them with some earnestness. But we must not forget of how much higher value are right affections and right practice. It must be our faithful study and earnest wish to have correct views of the Christian doctrine ; but far more so to have the spirit of the gospel reign in our hearts, and regulate the conduct of life.

**END OF VOL II.**

















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